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ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

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Adventure
VOL. 16
NO. 6
MARCH 18 1918

HIDDEN TRAILS

A Five-Part Story

Part 1. by

William Patterson White

Author of "Paradise Bend," "Longhorns," etc.

CHAPTER I

THE HAPPY HEART

THERE was more than a fair sprinkling of customers in the Happy Heart Saloon. Tom Dowling of the 88, Racey Dawson of the Cross-in-a-box, and Telescope Laguerre of the Bar-S were draped against the bar earnestly engaged in lowering the tide in a bottle of Old Crow. Four of the Hogpen outfit and a skinny gentleman hailing from the Double-Diamond-A were absorbed in a draw at the table in the far corner. At the other table, near the door, sat Johnny Ramsay of the Cross-in-a-box. He was a tall, lean young man, with a cool, sardonic gray eye and a sunburned face.

Taking infinite pains, he built himself a cigaret. But instead of lighting the slim, white roll, he crushed it between his brown fingers, blew away the clinging grains of tobacco, and clasped his hands behind his head. He glanced at his three friends braced at the bar and yawned. He gazed at the card players, and his yawn became wider. He tilted back in his chair and stared at the ceiling.

"Smokin's no good," he said to himself. "Licker's no good, an' I don't feel like playin' poker nohow. I dunno what I want to do."

So, because he was bored, he brought the front chair legs to the floor with a crash, fished out a tremendous clasp-knife and began to whittle the table-top. In a plaintive monotone he started to sing:

> I ain't got no sweetheart,
> I ain't got no sweetheart,
> I ain't got no sweetheart,
> To sit an' talk with me.

"I shore wish to Gawd yuh had a sweetheart!" a peevish voice announced at the tail of the first verse. "Then maybe yuh'd stop choppin' my table to pieces!"

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Johnny lifted his cool gray eyes to the hot and angry face of the Happy Heart's proprietor.

"She's a right nice table," he observed pleasantly, and made the chips fly.

"Say—" began the outraged owner.

"Now look here," urged Johnny. "I ain't got a thing to do, not one —— l'il thing, an' I ain't got no sweetheart like I say, an' I gotta do somethin', ain't I, 'cause if I don't I'm likely to do most anythin'. So there y'are."

This facile explanation was not illuminating. Nor did it satisfy the proprietor. But Johnny Ramsay was known as an impulsive citizen of uncertain temper. The proprietor had no wish to antagonize the young man. He resorted to diplomacy.

"If it's all the same to you, Johnny," he said, in a wheedling tone, "I'd just as soon yuh'd cut somethin' else, a tree maybe, or the wife's kindlin' or anythin' like that. But yuh know how it is yoreself, folks like to play cards on that table, an' whittlin' her up 'll sort o' spile her."

"Puttin' her thataway makes it a cat with another tail entirely," Johnny declared handsomely, and closed his knife.

Satisfied, the proprietor departed. The customers who had watched the little scene grinned at each other and returned to their liquor. Johnny attacked the construction of another cigaret.

At this juncture a stranger entered the saloon and crossed to the bar. He was a man of middle height, this stranger, with a curling brown beard and a quick, bright eye. Johnny idly watched him as he stood with one foot on the rail and drank his whisky. The Cross-in-a-box puncher noted that the brown-bearded man, while careless in attitude and demeanor, was, over the rim of his glass, subjecting each occupant of the room to a close scrutiny.

"Must be a deputy or somethin'," thought Johnny, and turned his eyes toward the back of the room, for he perceived that his turn was coming next.

Johnny's roving glance fell on one of the rear windows. This window was open and through it a man was staring, with a peculiar malevolence, at the brown-bearded stranger. But on the instant the man wheeled and disappeared.

"Now that's shore an odd number," commented Johnny, referring to the malevolent one, not his disappearance. "An' I dunno him, either. Whoever he is, the jigger with the brown whiskers ain't popular with him a li'l bit."

Johnny, reflecting on the strangeness of life, tilted his chair back against the wall. He hooked his heels in a rung and his thumbs in his belt and appeared to drowse. But he was not drowsing. Far from it. Through the slits of his narrowed eyelids he was alternately watching the stranger and the front door. For, in the longhorn country, when one gentleman bestows baleful glares upon another, it behooves the innocent bystander to be vigilant.

Johnny was not greatly surprised when the vindictive-looking window-gazer walked in from the street and went to the bar.

He was not a prepossessing person, this second stranger. In the first place his long frame was rawboned to a degree, and he shambled rather than walked. His hands were large, the backs covered with stiff red hair, and splay-fingered. His face was hairless, freckled, hollow-cheeked and long-jawed. His nose was hooked like an eagle's beak, and his eyes were of a blank, curious yellow.

The man, as he stood in front of the bar, pushed back his hat, a wide, white Stetson with an extra high crown. Johnny saw that the man's forehead was reptilian and his hair the hue of flame.

The brown-bearded stranger, beyond a keen glance, paid the newcomer no attention. The red-head appeared not to be conscious of the other's presence. Johnny slumped further down in his chair and became even more watchful.

The flame-haired stranger, limiting himself to one finger at a throw, had two drinks. Then he slouched across the floor to where the card players were busy. He watched them for a space.

"Gents," he said suddenly in a singularly pleasant voice, "gents, is this here a private game or can anybody get in? Yuh see, I got some *dinero* I'd shore admire to get action on."

"Shore yuh can," agreed the skinny gentleman from the Double-Diamond-A, who was losing. "Sit in, an' welcome. Maybe yuh'll change my —— luck."

"Yuh can just kiss yore coin good-by," laughed one of the Hogpen boys. "Yuh'll shore lose it. Luck's with me today."

"That so," said the red-head, smiling in such a way that the long canines showed

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on the left side of his mouth. "Then let's all have a drink on the strength of it. Name yore pizen, gents."

Bottle and glasses were brought to the table by the bartender. Johnny observed that the stranger did not overstep his limit of one finger. Furthermore, the man drank but the merest swallow of the one finger.

Play was resumed. The brown-bearded man still stood at the bar. He had had three drinks, perhaps four. On this point the observant Johnny was not positive.

Of the men at the bar, Dowling began to draw under the influence. Five minutes later he wandered out, a perceptible stagger in his walk. Racey Dawson and Telescope Laguerre continued to talk and drink. Dawson was not one to become plastered very easily, and as to Laguerre, his ability to carry liquor was marvelous.

Johnny watched the card players. When it came the red-haired stranger's turn to deal Johnny was fairly certain that the man dealt himself two cards from the bottom of the pack. But "fairly certain" is not conviction, and it was none of his business anyway. So reasoned Johnny. Alert as a weasel, he ceased not to observe.

"He's keepin' after Windy," said Johnny to himself, as the play proceeded.

Windy was the skinny gentleman from the Double-Diamond-A, and his financial state was becoming tottery. Whatever he lost was added to the growing columns of chips in front of the red-head. To these columns the Hogpen boys likewise contributed to some extent.

"He's shore a ring-tailed wonder," admitted Johnny, after the deal had gone 'round three times, and the stranger had held wonderful hands three times. "This is gettin' interestin'. That last time he dealt himself *three* cards from the bottom. He's gettin' reckless, that jigger. He don't care nothin' a-tall what he does. An' yet I couldn't swear he done nothin' out o' the way. His fingers is so —— quick."

Windy, broke, was endeavoring to put up his six-shooter as security.

"No," demurred the red-head. "I got a gun. Don't want another. Pony an' saddle? Not me. I got them, too."

Windy rose and went to the bar and endeavored to pawn his gun with the bartender. But the proprietor entering at the moment, that business arrangement was nipped in the bud.

"No guns goes, Windy," the proprietor stated firmly. "I couldn't give yuh a simoleon for a bushel o' Colts. I got nineteen in a box behind the bar now. Some of 'em's been there six months an' no action yet. I can't sell 'em 'cause if I do the owner's bound to turn up with the price an' want his gun back. Five dollars apiece I gave on 'em—ninety-five wheels, I'm tellin' yuh. An' I might just as well 'a' slung the coin in the stove for all the good she does me. No, Windy, I'm sorry, 'cause yo're a real gent an' a reg'lar customer, but yuh gotta take yore gun an' go some'ers else. No, sirree—ponies an' saddles don't go. I got four saddles an' five ponies in the corral, an' Gawd knows when the boys'll come for 'em. So there y'are."

Windy departed after vain efforts to raise even such a minor sum as four bits among the other occupants of the room.

JOHNNY perceived that the red-head, whose deal it was, had done nothing but shuffle and reshuffle the cards and watch Windy while the latter was endeavoring to effect a loan. Once he had licked his lips, and the yellow eyes had flickered for an instant to the brown-bearded citizen standing at the bar. For all that the red-head was leaning his stomach against the table and had slouched down his shoulders in a decided slump, there was to Johnny's mind more than a hint of tenseness in the man's aspect. Somehow he reminded Johnny of a dynamite cartridge after the fuse has been lit. There was about them both the same suggestion of violent possibilities.

At Windy's departure the red-head straightened in his chair. But instead of dealing he laid the cards on the table.

"Say, mister," he called to the brown-bearded man, "how about takin' our friend's place? Just for a hand or two till he gets back?"

The thin lips had widened into a smile, a smile that displayed the long canines on the left side of his mouth. But the yellow eyes were not smiling. Blank and cold, they stared at the brown-bearded man.

The latter turned an indifferent head and regarded the speaker.

"I dunno," he said. "I don't feel like poker."

"Just to oblige us," the red-head wheedled in his melodious voice.

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Brownbeard shook his head.

"No, I guess not."

"Well, o' course," said the red-head in a tone pregnant with insult, "if yuh'd rather not—or somethin'."

Brownbeard responded by striding to the table, pulling out Windy's chair and sitting down.

"I'll go you," he said shortly, his eyes, narrowed, gazing fixedly at the red-head.

"Now, that's the talk!" cried the red-head cheerily, while the Hogpen boys looked from one to the other in wonderment.

It seemed to them that their little playmate had wilfully endeavored to antagonize Brownbeard. Why? But the cards had been dealt and they picked up their hands with the question unanswered.

Johnny shifted slightly in his chair. What had been apparent to the Hogpen punchers had not escaped his attention. More and more he disliked the red-head.

The deal circled the table, and Windy had not yet returned. The red-head did not once look toward the doorway, but it was manifest that he was accelerating the play. He made his bets quickly and handled his cards with suspicious haste.

It came Brownbeard's turn to deal. He gathered up the cards, shuffled them methodically and began to deal. At the instant that he flipped a card to the red-head the latter's long left arm lashed out with the speed of a striking snake, his fingers struck the cards in the dealer's hand and sent them flying.

Johnny did not see the red-head go after his gun. But there was a flash and a crash and a burst of gray smoke, and Brownbeard huddled down in his chair, then flopped forward across the table, his face among the scattered cards.

The red-head was on his feet, his gun, thin smoke spiraling from the muzzle, still in his hand. There was a great and righteous indignation in the red-head's face and in his voice when he exclaimed:

"He tried to skin us, the —— tinhorn! Didya see him deal from the bottom of the deck?"

"No, I didn't," said one of the Hogpen boys, sliding out of his chair with a very pale face.

"I didn't see nothin' like that either," declared Johnny, who had come out of his seeming lethargy on the jump.

"Well, *I* seen him," averred with finality the red-head. "The —— tin-horn! I didn't think he looked like that or I'd never 'a' asked him over."

"Wouldn't yuh?" queried Johnny with a level glance of frank aversion.

The red-head continued to ignore him, and with a nice perception tilted and pulled away the table as Laguerre and a Hogpen boy raised the body of Brownbeard. They laid the body on the top of the bar near the door. There was no need to listen for heart-beats. The red-head's bullet had bored the skull from front to rear. It was Johnny who placed Brownbeard's hat over the dead face, and it was the proprietor who removed the spurs to the end that the bar might not be unduly scratched.

Johnny and the others stood together in the vicinity of the corpse and eyed the red-head. Which person had resumed his seat at the table and was cutting the cards, right hand against left. He looked up, and grinned as he caught their glances.

"Some sudden," he said quietly, "but she had to be done. I can't let nobody work a game like that on me. No sir, not while I got my health—an' a gun. She was the only trail out, gents, an' that's whatever."

Still they surveyed him in silence. Johnny yearned to give voice to his suspicion. But there it was—suspicion. He was not sure of his ground. The others, although they had seen nothing to hang suspicion upon, were instinctively aware that all was not right. The killing, fair enough on its face, yet bore an earmark or two of evil. The red-head had been too abrupt, for one thing, and for another, he had urged Brownbeard who patently had not desired to play, to sit in the game.

Entered then "Slim" Berdan, the town marshal, and a few curious citizens.

"What was the trouble?" asked Slim Berdan, a slight, wiry man with a black mustache and goatee.

One of the Hogpen boys told him what he knew of the case. The marshal listened in silence. The red-head displayed no interest. He was playing solitaire now, and his face was serious.

When the Hogpen boy had finished, the marshal walked straight across the floor to the table where the red-head sat. The latter raised his yellow eyes to Berdan's expressionless face. The marshal's hands

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were at his sides. They were not threateningly close to his guns. They were merely conveniently by.

"Stranger," said the marshal, "we don't know nothin' about yuh, an' we ain't aimin' to know nothin' about yuh. I ain't sayin' a word about the merits o' this case. Maybe you know 'em better'n I do. But I'm tellin' yuh this: yuh got twenty minutes to pull yore freight out o' Farewell. At the end o' that time if yo're still in town we'll sort o' make out to hang yuh some."

"But I like Farewell," protested the redhead injuredly. "I was figurin' on stayin' awhile."

"You'll shore stay quite a while if yo're here after the twenty minutes are up," said the marshal, and, as if the matter had been settled, he turned and walked away.

"I can see he means it," mourned the redhead, rising to his feet and grinning impudently at the line of unfriendly faces across the room. "An' just when I thought I'd found my happy home."

He departed, scuffing his toes. Ten minutes later they saw him ride past the saloon on his way out of town.

CHAPTER II

JOHNNY'S DECISION

"IF I wanted to kill a man," declared Johnny slowly, "I dunno but what as good a way as any'd be to call him a skin an' plug him quick."

The others nodded. Johnny was voicing their own thoughts.

"Dees feller she deed not even reach for her gun," said Laguerre, jerking his head toward the poor clay on the top of the bar. "Un dem card' was scattair so, we can not tell w'eddair she was deal de skeen game or not. By gar, Johnny ees right."

"On the other hand," put in Slim Berdan, "this red-haired gent does just exactly what he'd ought to done provided the other feller was cheatin'. In a case like this here yuh can't prove nothin'. Yuh can think a whole lot, an' yuh can tell the jigger who keeps alive at the finish to flit, but that's all yuh can do."

The shooting had a depressing effect. Men ceased to play cards and drank more than was good for the lining of their stomachs. Johnny sat in his tip-tilted chair, his hat pulled low down over his eyes. His thoughts were gloomy. It was not the first time he had seen death. But it was the first time he had seen a man killed without a chance to defend himself.

Mike Flynn, the one-legged owner of the Blue Pigeon Store, added to the general melancholy by stumping in with a sheet and laying out the ground-plan of a shroud on the body of the dead.

"I'll not see him go naked to his grave, the poor feller," asserted Mike Flynn, squinting along the doubled length of sheet. "He's got clo'es, I know that, but a funeral ain't a funeral without a shroud. I've seen many a lad when I was at sea slipped overside, an' they all had shrouds. I misdoubt it ain't legal without. Aye, an' a lump or two o' best Welsh ta sink 'em down. Glory be, the funerals I've seen. God be with the ould days."

Mike Flynn produced a short and blackened clay and rammed home the tobacco with a stubby forefinger. When his pipe was drawing well he sat down tailor-fashion on one of the card-tables and turned to with needle and thread at fashioning the necessary shroud.

Johnny watched Mike's flying fingers in fascinated silence and wished the storekeeper would stop humming that song. It was a doleful ditty having to do with a man that went away to sea and was drowned. Johnny would have gone out into the sunshine in search of realization, but he was afraid that if he did he would miss something. And that would never do.

"Now, here's a fine job," announced Mike Flynn suddenly, standing up on the table and shaking out the completed shroud as the housewife shakes out a table-cloth. "He'll slip into this just as nice as a girl's leg into a silk stockin'."

Mike dismounted from his table. Johnny pulled himself to his feet and went to assist Mike and the others. But before the shroud was adjusted an elderly, gray-mustached citizen pushed his way through the crowding onlookers. This man was Jake Rule, the Sheriff of Fort Creek County. Slim Berdan followed in his wake.

"Wait a shake before yuh cover his face up," said the sheriff.

The officer glanced at the dead and nodded.

"Is it?" inquired Slim Berdan.

"Yep, it's Mat Neville," answered the sheriff. "I kind o' suspicioned it might

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be, when yuh said he had a curly brown beard. ——! Mat never cheated in his life!"

"I knowed it!" burst out Johnny.

"I'd shore admire to 'a' been here when it happened, instead o' some'ers else," deplored the sheriff. "I'd enjoyed lookin' over the killer."

Johnny and a half a dozen others made eager haste to describe him, but the sheriff shook his head.

"Slim's told me what he looked like," he said, "an' I dunno him a-tall, Dunno as I ever even heard of him before. But I shore would like to 'a' seen him just out o' curiosity."

"Mat Neville," repeated Racey Dawson. "Seems like I heard there was a Wells-Fargo detective down at Seymour City named Mat Neville."

The sheriff glanced casually at Racey.

"This is him," he said shortly.

Creak and jangle! Hoofbeat and bump! The through stage from Paradise Bend to Marysville and the railroad was pulling into Farewell. It stopped in front of the post-office with a screeching of brake-shoes.

"By Gawd if the guard ain't downed!" exclaimed Johnny, looking through the window. "An' 'Whisky' Jim's creased on the head."

Here was a matter requiring instant investigation. The Happy Heart was forthwith deserted by all save the bartender and the corpse.

Whisky Jim, a bloody bandage under his slanted hat, hooked a heel in the brake-lever and swelled out his chest. He had a tale to tell and he realized the importance of his position.

"Road-agents—again," he replied to the shouted questions. "I'm slowin' up for that bend below the cutbank near the Hogback, when *bang!* goes a Winchester on the bank. An' the lead nicks me an' goes right on without stoppin' an' busts Jack plumb center. Don't even have time to raise his shotgun, Jack don't. Which that weapon slides clatterin' down on the doubletree an' Jack slides after on his head. That's all, gents, just the one shot, but it's enough. There's a beller o' 'Hands up!' but I don't need it. I've done stopped the team, set the brake, an' reached for the sky already.

"I've only got one good eye—the blood's runnin' down over the other, but I sees a-plenty. There's six o' the hold-ups this trip, an' they work fast. They line my passengers up alongside the stage an' go through 'em. One of 'em clumb up over the wheel an' handed off the Wells-Fargo box an' dumped her. Then they chased the passengers back inside an' told me to go on. No, they didn't touch the mail-bags. Seems like they knowed our Uncle Sammy'd get a heap riled up if they did.

"I will say this for 'em: they didn't rob me, an' they loaded Jack back up on top an' tied him fast with a lariat, an' they made one o' the passengers tie up my head so's I could see to drive. For road-agents, they was right human—considerin'."

"The Hogback's only fifteen mile south o' Rocket," remarked the sheriff. "Why didn't yuh drive back there an' scare up a posse?"

"Say, don't yuh s'pose I'd 'a' done that if I could?" Whisky Jim protested. "Them fellers said if I didn't keep a-goin' straight on they'd plug me for keeps, an' I believed 'em. But I told the agent at Cutter when I pulled in there last night, an' he sent one o' the hostlers to the Bend after the sheriff. I'd 'a' left Jack at Cutter only for his sayin' so often how he wanted to be buried in a reg'lar shore-'nough graveyard an' a hell-dodger to speak his li'l piece an' all. So he's goin' to Marysville an' have his graveyard. He was a good feller, Jack. I never did know his last name—huh?

"Now, Sheriff, how could I tell what they looked like when they all had masks on? They was dressed like punchers an' they had a six-shooter an' rifle apiece just like any other respectable gent."

"Is this here the ninth or tenth time yuh been stopped, Jim?" asked the sheriff.

"Tenth. Hell's bells, it shore is gettin' monotonous. Come along with that mail-bag, Rime. Djuh think I got time to wait all day?"

When the stage had creaked away, the sheriff spat reflectively into the dust of its passing and turned back with the crowd to the Happy Heart to finish the funeral.

They buried Mat Neville, not very deep, because the ground was hard, but they made amends by piling rocks and small boulders into a cairn. They sang "The Dying Ranger" with their hats off, and a kindly soul fashioned a cross from a cracker box and wrote Mat's name and address on the arms, employing for the purpose a rifle cartridge.

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After which they returned to the Happy Heart, for they needed cheering up.

AN HOUR later Johnny Ramsay, Racey Dawson and Telescope Laguerre were going into Bill Lainey's hotel in quest of supper when a dog-fight started in the street and they stopped to watch it. Just as one dog drove the other howling, a rider jingled up and halted in front of the doorway, The man was Bill Stahl, Sheriff of Sunset County. Bill Stahl spoke to the two punchers, and dismounted. He crossed the sidewalk and awakened Bill Lainey, who, following his habit, was dozing in a wire-bound chair tilted against the wall of the building. Bill Lainey, with a wheeze, heaved his fat bulk upright.

"Seen anythin' o' Mat Neville?" asked the sheriff.

"Mat Neville," repeated Bill Lainey, blinking his eyes rapidly, "Mat Neville? Why, why, he's dead."

Bill Stahl swore quite frankly, and demanded details. Johnny and his two friends, wondering what the reason for wanting Mat might be, went on into the hotel.

While they were eating, Sheriff Rule, accompanied by Sheriff Stahl, entered the dining-room. The Sunset officer carried a doubletree bolt, a carton of tacks, and several notices.

"Nail her on the wall," wheezed Bill Lainey, poking his head turtle-wise through the doorway. "Then gents can have somethin' to read with their meals."

Bill Stahl solemnly tacked up one of the notices with four taps of the doubletree bolt. Then he shifted his chew and expertly drowned a fly on the extreme outside edge of the window-sill.

"Gents," he said to the diners, indicating the notice with a backward jerk of his thumb, "gents, here's a chance to make money. But this reward yuh see here ain't all. Wells-Fargo offer the same. Their notices ain't arrove yet. When they do they'll be posted correct an' proper."

The two sheriffs departed, and Lainey's guests stopped shoveling long enough to read the notice twice over. It was an interesting bit of printing in that it set forth that, to the man or men who would deliver dead or alive, into custody, the several persons of the banditti who were operating in Sunset County, the territory would pay at the rate of one thousand dollars per bandit. As the man or men who attempted such a delivery stood an excellent chance of being shot, the one thousand was not excessive.

"Huh," snorted Windy of the Double-Diamond-A. "This is shore one on ol' Sunset County. Whatsa matter with them tarrapins up there? It oughtn't to be no job a-tall to curry a li'l short hoss like that."

"Yuh think so," contributed one of the Hogpen outfit. "Lemme tell yuh, Windy, as a friend, that when it comes to bein' slick, a band o' road-agents like this one o' Sunset's is shore hellamile."

"Y'betcha," corroborated Johnny, as earnestly as a man may with a mouthful of beans, "y'betcha, an' then some."

"I never knowed no road-agents real intimate," said Racey Dawson, "but I helped hang one once after he'd held up the Esthertown stage over in Green County when I was workin' for the T-Down, an' say! if they're all like that jigger! Yuh hear me talkin' when I tell yuh we had to run that lad eighty mile 'fore we got him, an' we wouldn't 'a' got him then only his hoss slipped on a slide an' him an' hoss went down that slide the whole length of her on their heads.

"The hoss busted most of himself, but the hold-up wasn't only bumped up, an' he scrouged in between two windfalls an' put up a fight to make yore hair curl. He downed one of the boys an' creased a coupla others. But we got him when his ammunition gave out. Yessir, a reg'lar road-agent organized for business can most generally make an ordinary gent step as high as a blind dog in a field o' stubble."

"Yo're whistlin'," said another Hogpen boy. "But two thousand apiece is shore a lot."

"But who's to pay for yore time if yuh don't get a one of 'em?" asked a practical Farewell citizen. "She's been goin' on more'n a year, an' them road-agents are still as plural as ever."

"That's right," said "Piney" Jackson, the blacksmith. "She's Sunset's funeral."

"Yuh'll notice, gents, them hold-ups don't get their legs over the tongue in this county," chimed in a Fort Creek booster. "Which they shore know better."

"All the same," muttered Johnny into his half-empty cup, "I wish I had some o' that money."

Racey Dawson overheard the remark and glanced sharply at his friend. Johnny

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was already shoving back his chair. Without looking either at Racey or Telescope, Johnny left the dining-room. Racey nudged Telescope.

"Johnny's got some fool notion," he whispered. "I can tell, because he looks so —— careless. Le's foller him."

Once in the street Johnny started in the general direction of the sheriff's house. Opposite the Blue Pigeon Store he turned aside as if to enter, but instead slipped into the narrow space between the side-wall and the next building. And Racey and Laguerre saw him slip.

"What d'I tell yuh?" demanded Racey. "What d'I tell yuh, huh? He's up to somethin' an' he don't want us to know what it is. An' when Johnny gets mysterious he needs lookin' after."

"We weel do dat," said Laguerre, and flashed his white teeth in a grin.

The unsuspecting Johnny hurried past the rear elevations of the buildings on Farewell's single street till he came to the last house. This house was the official residence of Sheriff Rule. The kitchen door was open. Judging by the clatter and the shrieks, human and otherwise, Mrs. Rule was washing simultaneously the dishes, the dog and the baby. But Johnny remained unperturbed. In common with every one else, he knew the workings of the sheriff's ménage. For it was the custom of ingenious Mrs. Rule to tie the baby and the household pet, by waist and neck respectively, to opposite legs of the table while she went about her housework.

"Hi there, fellah!" called Johnny loudly, one foot on the threshold. "Pull his ol' tail for'm. Whatsa dawg for, huh? Yo're shore one great kid. Gettin' to look more like yore ma every day. Oh, howdy, Mis' Rule," he continued unblushingly, taking off his hat. "I didn't see yuh at first. How are yuh, ma'am? Yo're lookin' fine. Sheriff 'round?"

BEFORE the pleased and portly Mrs. Rule could reply her husband appeared in the doorway of an inner room.

"You bet I'm 'round," he shouted above the tumult of wretched dog and happy little child. "Gotta be, when young fellers like you come hangin' 'round the kitchen an' pass compliments with my wife."

"You go 'long!" beamed Mrs. Rule, flapping a dish-towel at him. "Climb out o' my kitchen, the both o' yuh, before I lean on yuh with the broom."

"Come along, Johnny," laughed the sheriff. "She's mad 'cause I heard yuh. Oh, yuh gotta get up early to fool the old man, y'betcha."

"Sheriff," said Johnny, when the door was shut, "what's all this here about them road-agents o' Sunset County?"

"Why, yuh know yoreself, Johnny, how them jiggers been holdin' up the stages, an' rubbin' out miner folks an' sim'lar citizens, yuh——"

"Yeah, I know all that," interrupted Johnny. "I just want to know what you know about 'em."

"Not a —— thing," was the prompt reply, "an' at that it's as much as everybody else knows."

"Don't Bill Stahl know nothin', either?" disappointedly.

"If he does, he ain't told me. Say, Johnny, djuh s'pose if Bill knowed anythin' a-tall to begin work on he'd go cavortin' 'round tackin' up signs? It stands to reason, Bill bein' a sensible chunker, that he wouldn't want for that reward to be got by some one else less'n he seen he'd no chance to glom on to her himself. Here's Bill now. Y'ask him'n see what he says."

The sheriff of Sunset pushed open the front door and entered. He had one notice left. This he proceeded to tuck by one corner into a crack in the wall so that it proclaimed slantingly the intentions of the Territory.

"Gotta use her up somehow," he explained. "Yuh can make a lighter out of her when yuh run short, Jake."

"Say, Sheriff, don't yuh know nothin' about them hold-ups?" Johnny began, without preliminary.

The pupils of Sheriff Stahl's greenish-gray eyes became mere pinpoints of steel.

"Meanin'?" he demanded frostily.

Johnny flung up a hand palm outward.

"I don't mean what yuh think I mean, Bill," said he, with his engaging grin. "Njuh s'pose 'f I meant that I'd come prancin' up an' ask yuh about it?"

"We-ell," said Sheriff Stahl hesitatingly, his voice still icily hard.

"Don't yuh understand, Bill, all I'm tryin' to get at is ain't there some li'l sign for a peg to hang suspicion on? Yuh see,

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I'm figurin' on goin' after that reward, an' I want somethin' to go on."

"If yuh'd only said that at first," exclaimed Sheriff Stahl, his face clearing. "But I'd oughta knowed yuh didn't mean nothin', Johnny. That's me, always jumpin' spang at conclusions an' missin' the black nineteen out o' twenty. Listen here, Johnny, there ain't nothin' to hang suspicion on. Not one —— li'l thing. I tell yuh, them fellers might be light smoke in a gale o' wind for all yuh can see o' them an' their trail. Honest, I'm almost beginnin' to believe in ghosts."

"Wells-Fargo ain't believin' in no ghosts," put in Sheriff Rule.

"Yuh bet they ain't," agreed the Sunset officer. "Johnny, yuh heard me ask Bill Lainey if Mat Neville was around. I was to meet him here this afternoon, an' sort o' talk things over in this deal, an' see if we couldn't find some wagon-track to start in on. But there's no findin' out nothin' from pore Mat now. An' he didn't know no more'n me anyway likely."

"Yuh don't think the red-head could have had anythin' to do with it, do yuh?" was Johnny's question.

"With the hold-ups? Not him, yuh can gamble on it. From what Jake says he's a right tall jigger, skinny as a crane, an' walks funny. There wasn't no gent as tall as him in any o' these hold-ups. I got affidavits an' wrote-out descriptions from Whisky Jim an' seven other fellers in different hold-ups, an' I know. No sir, they ain't no such chunker as that red-headed killer in the gang. He's somebody that crossed Mat's trail some'ers else or somethin' an' took this chance to play even."

"But Mat didn't know him," objected Johnny. "If he had he'd never 'a' set down with him so free an' easy."

"Can't help it," snapped Bill Stahl, somewhat nettled at this questioning of his judgment. "She's like I say: this red-head ain't in the gang. I wish he was. A shinin' landmark like him would be just too easy to trail."

"How many in the gang, Bill?" asked Johnny. "Got any idea?"

"Between twenty an' thirty," the sheriff answered.

"Many's that?"

"It's my guess, an' yuh can go the limit I'm right. Why, say, there's only six or seven show up at a hold-up, but by the number o' hold-ups an' the close way they come together there's a lot more'n six or seven in the gang."

"Shore," cut in Jake Rule, "no half dozen could be as busy as all that an' keep it up the way these fellers do. She's a big gang, take my word for it."

"Yeah," said Johnny, his gray eyes more sardonic than ever, "she sounds a heap interestin'. I guess now I'll just go after that reward."

"Just you by yoreself?" queried Sheriff Stahl.

"Just me by myself."

At this juncture the front door flew open and Racey Dawson and Telescope Laguerre entered without knocking. Racey shook his head and his finger at Johnny Ramsay.

"We heard yuh through the window," he said, "an' y'ain't a-goin' to do nothin' like that on yore high lonesome. Not for one li'l minute y'ain't. Telescope an' me have decided to go with yuh, an' then we can sort o' look after yuh an' horn in on the two thousand wheels a bandit. Ropin' two cows at once. What do you guess?"

"I guess yuh can both go plumb t'——!" burst out the indignant Johnny. "Y'act like I needed a nurse!"

"Yuh need two of 'em," averred Racey placidly. "An' yo're goin' to have 'em. Why, Johnny, dear, s'pose yuh got shot or plugged or somethin'. What'd we do. I'd like to know? An' what'd you do, with nobody 'round to write yore will for yuh?"

For an instant Johnny's face hardened, then he laughed.

"Whatcha goin' to do with a couple o' —— fools like these here?" he asked of the two sheriffs.

CHAPTER III

PLANS

"I S'POSE I better act like I never seen yuh before," observed Sheriff Stahl.

"Now that's just what yuh don't want to do," hastily demurred Johnny. "It stands to reason that them fellers are old pie in these parts. They gotta be, or they'd 'a' been caught before now. Well, then, don't yuh s'pose they'll have a fair idea about who's friends with who? Actin' like yuh don't know us 'll shore make 'em suspicious."

"Dat ees right." Thus Laguerre.

Sheriff Stahl nodded.

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"Yore best plan," went on Johnny, "is just to say 'Howdy' free an' easy when we pass yuh an' let it go at that. If we gotta talk to yuh we'll let yuh know an' meet yuh out in the hills some'ers. None o' this comin' to the house at night. They'd catch on to anythin' like that quick. An' yuh'd better not say anythin' about us to yore deputies, either."

"Why not?" demanded the sheriff. "They're good boys, an' sensible boys an'——"

"I know they are, but they're young, an' they take a drink now an' again."

"So do you. So do I."

"That's all right, but we ain't gabby. Tellin' yore deputies won't help none. She's enough for you to know. Let it go at that."

"All right, all right, I won't tell 'em." The sheriff's indorsement was a grumble.

"Now for the rest of it," went on Johnny: "One of us'll get a job at the stage corrals, an'——"

"I'll fix it up with the agent," interrupted Sheriff Stahl.

"Yeah, an' have 'Tug' Wilson blat it all out the first time he gets loaded!" exclaimed Johnny. "Tug's a good agent all right, but he's a —— sight better drunkard."

Sheriff Stahl, not at all pleased at Johnny's prompt dismissal of his every suggestion, began to stare rather fixedly at the Cross-in-a-box puncher.

"By ——!" tactfully interposed Sheriff Rule. "I just got in three quarts o' fifteen-year-old Bourbon by the last stage. Straight from Kentucky, gents, an' like oil. I'll get her."

The whisky, mellower than a ripe Sheepnose, greatly lessened the tension. Sheriff Stahl pulled in his horns and smiled pleasantly over the second glass.

"Yuh got one job settled," said he; "how about the others?"

"Jobs won't be too plenty, that's a cinch," observed Racey, "especially jobs where we can slide 'round an' look over whatever's infectin' the landscape."

"There y'are!" Johnny exclaimed. "Stray men!"

"Stray men!"

"Shore, stray men. Huntin' strays'll give us all kinds o' chances to chase around, an' it'll look natural. Nobody wonders or asks questions about where a stray man goes. She's a cinch. Don't you worry, Sheriff. Yore road-agents is as good as dead, caught, or lynched."

The patronizing tone of the last sentence grated on the sheriff's sense of what was due him. He would have been pleased to take offense, but decided that such a course would be both small-chested and foolish. He grunted his trust that Johnny's assertion would prove correct and opened the door.

"See yuh in the Bend—yuh'll know where to find me," was his parting remark.

The door slammed.

Three minutes later Johnny led his two friends in the direction of Bill Lainey's corral. Once behind the corral, Laguerre and Racey faced Johnny, their expressions eloquent of the doubt within.

"Who weel geeve us de job?" questioned Laguerre.

"That'll be easy," the confident Johnny assured him. "Wages are no object with us. We're willin' to work for nothin'—except the feller who draws the stage station job. He's gotta have reg'lar wages to make it look right. But the stray men are different. Scott——"

"Oh, they are, are they?" cried Racey. "Which I'd admire for to know why. Me, personal, I'm no philanthropist, an' workin' for nothin' is expensive."

"Oh, unbutton yore shirt an' spend two bits once in a while!" snarled the exasperated Johnny. "If I liked the feel o' money as much as you do, I'd shore turn road-agent myself."

"Well, I don't like workin' for nothin'," grumbled Racey.

"Neither do I," countered Johnny, "but that's no reason why yuh gotta lollop around with a face as long as a pony's. Stop cryin', for Gawd's sake. Baby can't have his bottle now, no matter how much he bellers!"

"Yuh know what yuh can do, don't yuh?" barked Racey indignantly.

But Johnny refused to follow up the opportunity, and proceeded to finish the outline of his plan.

"Scotty Mackenzie'll give us jobs," he said, "an' havin' us work for nothin'll hit Scotty right where he lives. He's worse'n Racey when it comes to savin' money—aw right, aw right! Have it yore own way. Yuh throw money away with both hands an' hire a friend to help yuh. How's that? As I was sayin' before Racey climbed up on

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the table again, Scotty'll make out to hire Telescope an' me, an'——"

"What!" howled Racey. "Telescope an' you! Is that the way yuh've schemed her out? I'm to work 'round the —— station an' wrangle ponies while you an' Telescope scamper over the hills an' far away an' have all the fun. Is that it, huh? Well, it ain't! Yuh got a —— ov a nerve, you have, but I won't do it! I'll be a stray man too if I gotta hire m'self to m'self, an' that's whatever!"

"Tell the neighbors, why don'tcha? We'd shore like everybody to know our li'l plans."

"But you want all the fun," protested Racey, lowering his voice.

"I thought you didn't wanta work for nothin'. That stage station job ought to suit yuh ace-high."

"It did, when I figured on one o' you fellers takin' it. But comin' right down to cases, I don't want none of it in mine. I want action, an' I'm a-goin' to get it."

"Well, we'll see," soothed Johnny. "We'll see how we can fix her up to please yuh."

"Yuh can just bet yuh will," the truculent Racey stated with conviction. "I've seen prize hawgs, but yo're the prizest."

"Aw shut up, an' let a feller think!" rejoined the ever-courteous Johnny.

"What with?" jeered Racey.

"Say——"

"Yeah, you showed how much yuh thought by talkin' man-fashion to Bill Stahl. Whatcha wanta get him riled for? Maybe we'll need him."

"Yuh poor fool! Honest to Gawd, Racey, if yuh had any more brains yuh'd be half-witted."

"Huh!"

"Lookit here. Bill Stahl's either a —— fool or he's in with the road-agents."

"I don't t'ink so, me," declared Laguerre.

"Which—in with the road-agents?"

The half-breed nodded.

"Yuh dunno, I dunno, an' Racey shore dunno. But I aim ta find out. If he's square, then he's a —— fool, 'cause a square sheriff who can't locate even a whisky-glassful o' suspicion against them hold-ups by this time must be a —— fool. If he's square an' a —— fool, gettin' him mad can't hurt us, an' it'll only make him work harder. If he ain't square then he'll do somethin' to put the kibosh on us right away."

"Whatcha tell him anythin' at all for then?"

"To find out where he stands. We gotta know that. Before we're through we'll have to find out where a good many gents in Fort Creek County stand. Huh? Shore not. We'll be all right so long's we watch him. The first sudden move he makes we'll get him, an' there's our work half done. When we get just one o' the gents who's mixed up in this the rest'll be easy. Whatsa matter with yuh, Racey? Lookit Telescope. He ain't actin' nervous o' nothin'."

"I ain't nervous!" bawled the outraged Racey. "An' I can lick the two of yuh with both hands tied behind me."

"I guess now yuh really could," said Johnny seriously, "'cause all yuh'd have to use then 'ud be yore tongue. Now, now, good hogs, nice li'l doggie, pretty kitty, don't scratch. Telescope, he's gettin' too —— fresh, we'll just have to give him the Dutch rub. Grab him!"

So they grabbed him, and, despite heavy resistance, they inflicted upon him the Dutch rub. Which exercise, as every one knows, consists in currying a man's head with the bare nuckles. When Racey had yelped "Uncle" several times, and a perfect understanding had been established, they desisted from their labors and rolled cigarets in flawless amity.

"Yuh don't guess there's twenty or thirty in the gang, do yuh?" asked Racey, when his cigaret was burning properly.

"Which I should say not. Stahl's crazy. Twenty or thirty! Hell's bells, can yuh see a gang o' road-agents splittin' what they steal twenty or thirty ways? I can't, an' my eyesight's as good as the next feller's. In the first place none of 'em 'ud make enough, an' in the second twenty or thirty u'd make a risk too big. Somebody'd shore snitch. No, sirree, I'm tellin' yuh there ain't more'n six or seven at the outside."

"That's twelve or fourteen thousand wheels," announced Racey Dawson.

"Eef we have de luck, ten t'ousan'," qualified Laguerre.

"Whatsa matter with ten thousand split three ways?" observed Johnny. "She's a —— sight more'n we'll earn wrastlin' cattle."

"Shore," said Racey. "When'll we go?"

"The sooner the quicker, but we gotta see Jack Richie first, Racey, an' Telescope'll want to go back to the Bar-S. Today's Tuesday. S'pose we meet here Thursday an' start then."

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"Dat ees all fine," declared Laguerre, "but we do not wan' for ride to de Ben' togedder."

"An' why not?" inquired Johnny.

"Well den, tree men ridin' een togedder weel make de road-agent' ask de —— question, *bien sur*."

"Never thought o' that. We'll have to go one at a time. Who goes first?"

CHAPTER IV

THE NORTHERN TRAIL

"DEED Jack mak de row w'en you say you wan' for go?" asked Laguerre.

"Naw," grinned Racey, "jus' says, 'Oh, I s'pose so. Soon's you chunkers get any money yuh gotta canter out an' spend her.' "

"Give us our time an' says not to get too drunk," said Johnny. "Drunk! If he only knowed he'd give up his job o' managin' the Cross-in-a-box an' come along."

"He don't an' he won't," chuckled Racey. "C'mon, Johnny, whatcha waitin' for? She's Thursday afternnon a'ready. Maybe now yuh'd like me to take yore turn?"

"Not so's yuh could notice it," returned Johnny. "Li'l Mister Racey drawed the shortest piece o' grass, an' li'l Mister Racey'll follow Telescope like he'd oughta."

"Well, maybe," grumbled Racey, "but I don't take no roustabout's job at the stage corral, yuh can bet on that."

Within ten minutes Johnny Ramsay was on the trail leading to Paradise Bend. He rode at a trot, for there were some two hundred miles of side-hill and flat in front of his horse's nose, and the lope is not a long-distance gait.

On a morning, three days later, where the trail topped a ridge and dropped down into a broad basin where red willows and cottonwoods grew beside a shallow creek Johnny stopped to tighten his cinches. When the saddle was nailed fast he swung up and rode onward, and as he rode he sang pleasingly of the fortunes of a certain Sweet Betsy from Pike. For he knew that the shallow creek was the Yellow Medicine, and that Paradise Bend was a scant twenty miles away.

And now the trail ran close beside the trees bordering the bank of the creek. The tired pony, grateful for the patches of shade, slowed of his own accord to a walk. A little breeze played among the cottonwoods and Johnny kicked his feet out of the stirrup and pushed back his hat the better to enjoy it. His singing dwindled to a tuneful hum, barely to be heard above the voice of the creek bubbling to itself in the shallows. Through the gaps in the trees Johnny saw the lush green of the sun-drenched flats on the other side of the creek. On his own side the ground rose in rounded swoops to the rock-crowned summit of a high and humpbacked hill where jackpines and spruce grew among the outcrops.

A mile ahead a pine-clad spur of the hill sprawled downward to the very bank of the creek. Here a way for the trail had been cut through the trees. In Johnny's opinion the spot where the trail bent in among the cottonwoods was an ideal place for a hold-up.

"A team's gotta slow for the turn, ain't they, feller?" he said to his horse. "An' they's plenty cover on both sides. I remember they used to be two big rocks about twenty feet up from the road among them pines. A gent could lay behind 'em all salubrious an' happy an' ventilate most anythin' he'd a mind to. Kind o' funny, but they ain't never been a hold-up just right there that I know of."

Crack! Crack! Crack! Three flat reports sounded faintly on the trail ahead. Johnny promptly jerked his horse in among the cottonwoods. He dragged the Winchester from the holster under his right leg, and clicked a cartridge into the barrel. He lowered the hammer to safety and rode forward through the trees.

"They wasn't shootin' at me," he reflected. "Not for a minute. It's a hold-up, no two ways about it. An' right where they've never had one. This is shore luck."

But there are many kinds of luck. This was one of those kinds. Johnny was halfway from the ideal spot for a hold-up when, coming to a crook in the bank of the creek, he had an excellent view of a stretch of water a half-mile in the clear and three horsemen fording it briskly. As the riders were at the very end of the half-mile stretch and, furthermore, disappeared almost on the instant among the trees of the farther bank, Johnny neither shouted nor shot. In the one case they could not have heard him above the noise of their own passing, and in the other a law-abiding person may not cut down without some shred of evidence betokening evil intent. Of pursuit there was

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no question. Johnny's tired horse was utterly incapable of any exercise so violent.

Johnny promptly took to the trail and, by dint of spurring and use of the quirt, the pony was persuaded into a gallop.

Among the cottonwoods, where the trail turned aside to skirt the spur, Johnny halted his trembling pony. For his expectations of the worst were fulfilled. Tragedy at her blackest had been abroad, and departing, had left behind her in the trail a dead horse and two dead men.

The dead horse lay between the shafts of a buckboard. Of the two dead men one hung face downward over the dash, the other lay with arms all abroad across the seat, his eyes staring at the hot, bright sky.

Johnny glanced across the creek. On the farther bank at this spot the cottonwoods grew but thinly, and he saw between the boles a mile-wide opening between two hills. Through this opening he glimpsed the treeless slope of the long ridge beyond. Up this slope three dots were crawling.

Johnny coolly flicked up his bucksight to extreme range, cocked his rifle, caught a steady rest against a cottonwood trunk and fired twice at those well-bunched dots. They were horsemen and the horses, two chestnuts and a blacktail dun, were hued precisely as were the horses the three men had galloped across the creek a few minutes before.

Johnny stepped past the thinning smoke-cloud and squinted at the distant slope. The three riders were still riding on, and they did not appear to be hurrying any.

"No go," mourned Johnny, and jammed his Winchester down against a cottonwood. "Can't hit 'em at this range—that's a cinch. No sir, Daisy Belle, yuh gotta carry just about six hundred yards more before yuh'd do me a bit o' good today."

Daisy Belle was what he called his Winchester. Johnny could not pull or shoot a six-gun as could Tom Loudon, the Bar-S foreman, but with the long arm he had yet to meet his equal. Prone, kneeling or standing, from the hip or shoulder, over all ranges, Johnny Ramsay was an expert. And now he felt himself and his pet grievously insulted that the men at whom he had just shot had not been within range by a few yards at least.

With a sigh Johnny went to examine the dead men in the buckboard. There was not much to see. A bullet had neatly traversed the head of each, and turned-out pockets testified to the thoroughness with which they had been robbed.

"They only left 'em their six-shooters," said Johnny, "an' a sawed-off shotgun."

He picked up the latter firearm. It was an eight-gage Greener, a weapon much affected by bartenders and Wells-Fargo guards. Johnny's eyes strayed to the two boulders wedged between pine trees on the steep slope above the trail.

"Bet that's where they hid out," he muttered, and laid the shotgun down on the seat, and walked 'round the buckboard preparatory to climbing the acclivity. But Johnny was not destined to investigate the place of ambush that day.

Even as he stepped across the trail there broke on his ear from the direction of the Bend the lively thudding of a galloping horse. Johnny slid silently to the tree against which his rifle leaned. But he did not pick up the Winchester. Instead he leaned against the tree-trunk and made himself a cigaret. Mechanically his fingers shaped the white roll, for his eyes were observing the approaching rider. He saw that the man looked neither to the right nor left, but rode with his eyes fixed on the opening in the trees into which the trail plunged.

Johnny, standing well back and behind three trees, stood in a perfect concealment. He stuck his unlighted cigaret between his lips, hooked his thumbs in his belt, crossed one foot over the other, and waited.

THE horseman rocked out of the open sunshine into the shadow of the trees and at sight of the buckboard slowed his horse to an easy halt. There was a certain keen eagerness in the gaze of the rider as he stared at the buckboard and what lay therein, and at Johnny's horse where it stood with lowered muzzle blowing the dust about on the surface of the trail.

The horseman was not a man to whom Johnny's heart went out. Plump and well-built, his hands were white and fat, and the dark hair showing beneath his white hat was slick with pomatum. Irresistibly, he brought to Johnny's mind that predatory night-runner, the crafty coyote. For the man's nose was long and thin and pointed, and his ears matched his nose, and his chin matched his ears. Johnny bet himself that

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the eyesockets were long and pointed too. Johnny coughed abruptly.

"I win," he announced, and calmly proceeded to light his cigaret. "I should 'a' said slantin' too," he added between puffs, referring to the other's eyes.

The horseman continued to regard him fixedly.

"What do you mean by 'slantin' too?' " he inquired, after a space.

"The sunbeams," replied Johnny, with a vacant stare. "Don't yuh see how they slant like through the leaves? Not that it's any o' yore business."

The stranger's wide mouth broadened into a Wintry smile. But his pale blue eyes, like other eyes into which Johnny had stared now and again, were mirthless. They perfectly bore out the threat of the Wintry smile.

"Didn't know I was here till I coughed, didja?" said Johnny. "I didn't know whether to cough or not," he added artlessly.

"Didn't you?"

"No, I didn't."

With a suddenness that was startling the stranger threw back his head and laughed. Oddly enough, it was a hearty, comradely laugh, the laugh that springs from a cheerful heart at peace with all the world. Furthermore, so great was the stranger's ecstasy that he reeled in the saddle.

When the man lowered his chin there were tears in his eyes. He wiped these away with a very large and very white handkerchief, and smiled anew. And now his smile was no longer Wintry. It held all the bright promise of a fair and Summer day. And his eyes, so lately full of chill menace, were warm with sportive waggishness. But Johnny liked him none the better, and watched him, if that were possible, a thought more closely.

"There seems to have been an accident," observed the stranger, nodding toward the buckboard.

"I dunno as I'd call it exactly that," corrected Johnny.

"What would you call it then?"

The blue eyes lost a trifle of their jocularity.

"I dunno," evaded Johnny. "I wasn't here when it happened."

Was that relief in the stranger's eyes? Was it? Johnny could not be positive. He sagged back against the tree-trunk, and rubbed one ankle against the other. His cigaret hung loosely from a corner of his slack mouth. He stared blankly at the stranger.

The latter slowly turned his eyes away from Johnny to the buckboard. Slowly he dismounted and went to the buckboard and bent over the two dead men and examined their wounds. He raised his head and shot a quick look at the lack-luster Johnny.

"Didn't hear any shots fired, did you?" was his casual question.

"Three," replied Johnny.

The stranger gazed fixedly at the puncher. His hand strayed to his vest. Johnny, expecting the flash of a Derringer, dropped his own right-hand slightly. But the stranger merely fished a cigar from an upper vest pocket. He bit off the end and struck a match. Whether he had perceived the movement of Johnny's hand, Johnny could not tell.

"You heard three shots," observed the stranger, watching the blue smoke curl upward.

"I said so—once," drawled Johnny.

"I beg your pardon," the stranger hastened to say. "Of course, you said so—once. See anybody?"

"Three men," said Johnny.

"Three men," repeated the stranger calmly. "Three men. Quite a band. Which way did they go?"

Johnny told him. The stranger nodded.

"It's no use chasing them," he declared. "Still, the sheriff should be notified at once."

"Shore should," Johnny agreed heartily. "S'pose yuh ride right back to the Bend an' do it. Yore hoss looks fresher'n mine."

"We might as well go together," suggested the stranger. "They've got such a start the posse won't be able to do much."

"Nothin' like tryin'. 'F I was you I'd climb on my hatrack an' pull my freight prompt an' sudden to the Bend. An' say, howdja know I'm goin' to the Bend?"

"This is how," remarked the stranger, and at the instant of his speaking Johnny looked into the stubby twin-barrels of a Derringer.

How the other had obtained the drop was a complete mystery to Johnny. Some of his surprise was manifest in his expression, and the stranger laughed.

"Didn't see my hand move, did you?" said he.

"Shore didn't," acknowledged Johnny,

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his upraised arms bending inward the brim of his hat. "What for a play is this, huh?" he added without anger. "You don't look like a road-agent."

The other laughed aloud.

"Road-agent!" he cackled. "Me! That's a good one, stranger. I've been called a lot of names during my life, but I've never been called a road-agent till now."

"Yuh'll be called worse things than that, if yuh don't lemme put my hands down soon," averred Johnny.

"You'll be called a corpse if you start putting them down before I give the word."

"I thought at first this was a joke, but I see now it ain't. She's serious, —— serious. My arms are beginnin' to ache. 'F you want my money, she's yores, the whole fi' dollars 'n six bits. Anythin' I can do to help, just lemme know. Always glad to oblige. That's me."

"Step away from the tree—that's it. Now turn around—you can drop your arms and face me, if you like."

Johnny wheeled. The stranger was stuffing Johnny's six-shooter into the waistband of his trousers. Johnny's rifle was propped against the hind wheel of the buckboard. Lacking the friendly weight in the holster against his leg, Johnny felt strangely lonely. It was the first time in his life that he had been disarmed.

"Now," said the stranger, "if you'll oblige me by mounting your horse we'll go back to the Bend."

"That's all right. But whyfor, stranger, whyfor?"

"You'll find out when you reach the Bend. Climb aboard. I've told you once."

Johnny swung up and rode past the buckboard. The stranger, displaying an agility extraordinary in one of his build, gained his own saddle without losing the magic of the drop.

Reaching down he picked up Johnny's Winchester by the barrel and laid it across his lap.

"Let's start," was the stranger's suggestion. "And if I were you I wouldn't look 'round too much. In the first place, it isn't necessary. I'll be right here. And in the second, your horse might stumble and throw you over his head. Why run the risk?"

"Shore," agreed Johnny. "Why?"

CHAPTER V

PARADISE BEND

THE name was half true. The town was situated at the bend of the Dogsoldier River where it loops between brown-topped Old Baldy Mountain and the dark green of the Government Hills. But it was no paradise. And certainly it conveyed not the remotest suggestion of Elysium to Johnny's mind as he entered it on that very hot afternoon, with the stranger and the stranger's Derringer at his horse's tail. Of course the affair would be adjusted within a few minutes. Sheriff Stahl would attend to that. Johnny's chief trouble was the rank humiliation of his position. He was not accustomed to being ridiculous.

The Bend, slightly larger than Farewell, prided itself on two stores, a Wells-Fargo office, two dance-halls and five saloons. The wide and straight main street and three crooked side streets were a riotous nightmare of false fronts, misspelt signs, box-sided shacks and log houses.

An indolent citizen roosting in a tip-tilted chair against the wall of the Wells-Fargo office was the first to glimpse the new arrivals.

"Whatcha got, Harry?" he called without moving.

"Road-agent," replied the stranger. "Caught him right at work."

By this time the indolent citizen was out on the street, running hard in the direction of a horse tied at the hitching-rail in front of the Three Card saloon.

"I'll getcha my rope," the erstwhile indolent one bawled over his shoulder. "She's brand new."

"Road-agent, huh!" cried Johnny, swinging his horse about. "You —— liar!"

"Put 'em up!" ordered the stranger, aiming the Derringer.

"I won't!" yelled Johnny, torn with rage. "I ain't got no gun! Yuh know I ain't! I dare yuh to shoot!"

The stranger did not shoot. He laughed.

"All right," he said. "Suit yourself. You'll be lynched so soon it doesn't really matter. Only—don't try to run."

From private residences, saloons, dance-halls and stores, came hurriedly the inhabitants of the Bend. Male and female, they clustered 'round Johnny and his captor and demanded details and the rope. Two prominent citizens, alive to their public duty,

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pulled Johnny from his horse. The puncher, shoved and jostled by the curious, ceased not to clamor for the sheriff.

"Shut up, for Gawd's sake!" importuned one of the men holding his arms. "Y'act like yuh had some rights."

Johnny did not obey, and the man ill-advisedly clapped a large and dirty hand over the prisoner's mouth. Johnny promptly bit his thumb. The man yelped and cuffed Johnny alongside the head. Johnny immediately wrenched both arms free and fell foot and fist upon the cuffer.

Johnny had barely thirty seconds to work in before being wrenched from his prey by seven men. Nevertheless the result was most creditable. The cuffer dragged himself upright, spat out two teeth and a mouthful of blood, and tenderly fingered a flattened nose and a torn ear.

"By Gawd!" mumbled the cuffer. "By Gawd!"

"Sic him again, Joe!" cried a derisive voice in the rear of the crowd. "Whatcha 'fraid of? There's eight men holdin' him!"

"Who said that!" bellowed Joe the cuffer, making a great show of seeking out the owner of the voice while the crowd roared its appreciation of the incident.

"Say, I want the sheriff!" yelled Johnny for the thirty-first time hand-running.

"Take it easy," advised one of his captors. "Yuh don't need no sheriff, nohow. Stop yore squallin', there's a good feller."

"There's a good ——, yuh fool!" retorted Johnny. "The sheriff knows me. He'll tell yuh I ain't a road-agent."

"That's what they all say," smiled the other. "Sorry we can't oblige yuh. But the sheriff ain't here. He's out some'ers romancin' 'round after a hoss-thief, an' I'm afraid we can't wait till he gets back."

Including the sheriff, Johnny's list of friends in the Bend was limited to some half-dozen people. There were Scotty Mackenzie and his outfit, but Scotty's ranch, the Flying-M, was ten miles out of town.

"Get Jim Mace an' 'Soapy' Ragsdale!" cried the desperate Johnny. "They know me. So does Cap'n Burr an' his family. Hell's bells, don't I get no chance a-tall?"

"No more'n yuh gave other folks," was the serene counter. "Can'tcha keep quiet? I wanta hear whatcha done."

"Johnny!" exclaimed a surprised voice. "Hello, Johnny. What's the trouble?"

A tall, big-boned man with square features plowed through the crowd, speaking as he came. The big man halted in front of Johnny and seized his hand where it showed beneath the other hands holding wrist and forearm.

"Whatsa matter?" he demanded, pumping violently.

"These —— fools say I'm a road-agent," explained Johnny.

"Then they are —— fools!" averred the bold Mister Mace. "Road-agent! Here comes Soapy."

The storekeeper Ragsdale pushed up and repeated the pump-handle process on Johnny's hand.

"Shore glad to see yuh, Johnny," he assured the prisoner. "Huh? Road-agent! We'll see about that. Hi, Buster!" he shouted to his small son, a goggle-eyed child of ten who was gaping at the prisoner between the bow legs of a lengthy cowboy, "chase over to the store an' get my Spencer carbyne. Skip, now."

Buster skipped and the crowd stilled its clamor somewhat. The hearty greeting of the prisoner by two such men as Jim Mace and Soapy Ragsdale was having its effect. The stranger who had captured Johnny rode forward and smiled engagingly down at Jim Mace and Soapy Ragsdale. They returned his smile with dispassionate stares.

"I said your friend is a road-agent," he remarked quietly. "I still say so. About three hours ago I found him standing beside Old Man Fane's buckboard. In the buckboard were Old Man and Bill Homan dead as Julius Cæsar, the pair."

"The dust!" gasped the Wells-Fargo agent. "The dust! Old Man Fane had two thousand ounces with him! He was takin' it to Marysville!"

"There was no dust in the buckboard," declared the stranger. "Both bodies had been robbed."

A great silence descended upon the crowd. Johnny could hear the rasp of a new rope being uncoiled. He reiterated his innocence and demanded that the sheriff be sent for. There was an instant cackle of uncheerful laughter. Old Man Fane had been popular in the Bend. Johnny endeavored to give his version of the affair. The cruel laughter smothered his utterance.

"No use waitin'," suddenly exclaimed the citizen who had been the first to glimpse the arrival of Johnny and the stranger.

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"There's evidence enough for forty men, gents. Here's the rope."

"Here's my carbyne!" rebutted Mister Ragsdale earnestly, plucking that seven-shooting firearm from the clutch of his panting offspring. "I ain't makin' no threats, not a —— threat, but yuh can put down a bet there's agoin' to be a whole lot more evidence before anybody gets hung. An' that's the branch I live on."

"We'll see about that!" shouted a voice from the crowd.

"If the gent will step out from where he's a-hidin' I'll be glad to argue with him," said Ragsdale silkily.

THE crowd did not laugh, and no one stepped out from anywhere. Mister Ragsdale evidently belonged to a species quite different from that of the prominent citizen whose thumb Johnny had bitten to the bone. Ragsdale waited a dignified minute, then, no overt act occurring, he turned on the stranger.

"Slay," said he, "where's the two thousand ounces Old Man Fane was packin'?"

"How do I know where this man hid it?" rejoined the stranger.

"Oh, he hid it, did he?" Jim Mace remarked with sarcasm. "Hid it, an' then waited for you to come along an' corral him. Is that it?"

"I guess he wasn't really intending to wait," smiled Slay, refusing to take offense. "You see, I came upon him unexpectedly."

"Gents!" cried Johnny, "you ain't had any real evidence yet. So far she's just his word against mine, an' my word's as good as his."

"We know him, an' we don't know you," returned a citizen with a dyed mustache.

"Soapy an' me know him!" blazed Jim Mace.

"O' course, o' course," soothed Dyed Mustache, whose name was Ganey, "but there's us. We got opinions, an' I tell yuh, Jim, I don't like the looks o' this jigger. He may be yore——"

"May be?" Thus, coldly, Mister Mace.

"He is yore friend," Ganey hastily corrected himself, and continued—

"But when did yuh see him last?"

"Two years," Jim Mace admitted reluctantly.

"There!" Ganey exclaimed in triumph. "Two years! Why, ——, Jim, that's a long time, two years is. I've seen hosses turn bronc in less'n two years. Why couldn't a gent do the same?"

"Some gents might," Jim Mace remarked meaningly, "but not Johnny Ramsay."

"We dunno that," averred Ganey. "We dunno nothin' about him. But he shore looks hard, an' lookit where Harry Slay found him—standing right alongside the buckboard, with Old Man Fane an' Bill Homan dead an' all. It shore don't look right, it don't. I've seen men stretched for a lot less, a whole lot less."

Ganey hooked his thumbs in the armholes of his vest, swelled out his chest, and looked about him for approval.

"Where did they find you, Johnny?" asked Ragsdale.

"At the buckboard, like he says," replied Johnny, "but——"

"Hear that!" shouted the officious Ganey. "He admits it! What are we waitin' for? Where's that rope?"

Ragsdale's carbine immediately covered Ganey's abdomen.

"Maybe this is why yo're waitin', Ganey," said he.

The crowd split away from Ganey. The latter was attracting entirely too much attention, and Soapy Ragsdale was known as a touchy gentleman utterly reckless of consequences.

"Oh, be reasonable, Soapy," urged Slay. "It isn't necessary to pull on any one. We're all friends here."

"All this talk o' ropes ain't friendly," complained the fretful Mister Ragsdale. "Besides, it makes me nervous, an' I don't like it."

"F'r Gawd's sake, Soapy, point that carbyne some'ers else," Ganey implored. "Yuh got the —— thing cocked."

"An' I got my finger on the trigger, if yo're a-lookin' for real information," returned Ragsdale calmly. "I don't like this here bellerin' 'round for ropes, an' I don't give a —— who knows it."

"I was just a-askin'," apologized Ganey. "It seemed natural—considerin'."

"You must admit, Soapy," ventured Slay, stepping forward, but carefully avoiding Ganey's immediate vicinity, "you must admit the evidence is fairly conclusive."

"Yo're another one that gives me a pain!" snapped Ragsdale. "S'pose yuh did find Johnny near the buckboard. S'pose they was forty dead men in it. It don't prove he done it, do it?"

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"There's an empty shell in his rifle," put forth Slay. "Here she is."

Jim Mace seized the Winchester and worked the lever. The ejector flipped out a spent shell. Jim Mace set the hammer at safety and picked up the shell.

"Nothin's proved yet," he said evenly.

"I fired two shots at the fellahs that done them killin's," explained Johnny.

"How many was they?" inquired Jim Mace.

"Three of 'em."

"Why didn't yuh say so before?" demanded Ragsdale's rival in trade, a cadaverous person named Dusenbury.

"Yuh didn't gimme no chance," retorted Johnny. "Lemme tell my side of it now."

"We're simply wasting time," protested Slay. "The man's guilty as all hell. Nothing he may say can alter it. Why wait?"

Which sentiments coincided with those of the majority. There was a shuffling of feet and a slow shifting of positions. Slay smiled—slightly. Jim Mace's mouth became a thin, white line.

"They say yo're a good man on the draw, Slay," observed Jim Mace. "If yuh think yuh can beat the lead out o' this Winchester, hop to it. Now I'm tellin' yuh if they is any hangin', she's goin' to be after a trial —a reg'lar fair trial. An' I'm tellin' yuh too if they is any hangin' before the trial you won't be with us to pull on the rope."

Slay looked from the muzzle of the Winchester bearing on his stomach to the serene features of Jim Mace.

"Why, of course," he agreed, with admirably simulated heartiness. "A trial, by all means. I should be the last to impede the wheels of justice."

"I hoped yuh'd see our way of it," Jim Mace said drily.

Came then a large man with a brown beard and a marshal's star, demanding, after the fashion of police officers, the reasons for drawn weapons. Several endeavored to enlighten him, but bull-voiced Jim Mace overrode them all and gave his version to the marshal.

"An' yuh know him, Dan," said Jim Mace in conclusion. "It's Johnny Ramsay, one o' the Cross-in-a-box outfit down on the Lazy. He's all right."

Dan Smith looked at Johnny.

"I remember him," was his grudging admission, "but I never said two words to him in my life. He's one o' Scotty's friends. I seen him once out at the Flying-M."

"Oh, y'admit it, do yuh?" barked Ragsdale sarcastically. "Yo're a fine Injun, you are. She's a wonder to me yuh don't say yuh never seen him before."

"Yuh know —— well, Soapy, I'm a officer o' the law," protested the marshal. "I can't go sympathize with nobody."

"—— yore sympathy!" snorted truculent Ragsdale. "Who wants the thing? We don't. We can look out for ourselves, an' we're agoin' to, y'betcha."

"Now, Soapy, it don't do no good to talk that way," chided the marshal. "An' it don't sound good. She sounds like yuh didn't care nothin' for law 'n order."

"I don't," Ragsdale promptly assured him. "I don't give three hells an' a dam' for law 'n order. I'm here to see justice done, an' that's a cat with another kind o' tail."

"But I'm here," averred the affronted marshal. "I'm paid to see justice done, so don't yuh worry."

"I ain't," returned Ragsdale. "Not one li'l bit."

"We gotta have a trial," proclaimed the marshal, endeavoring to appear unconscious of Ragsdale. "She's gotta be legal. We'll adjourn to the Golden Rule an' fight it out. There's plenty room there."

"An' there's a tree out back," supplemented one of the men holding Johnny.

"Oh yes, I was comin' to you, 'Spill,'" Jim Mace observed softly to the speaker. "S'pose yuh leggo that arm an' lemme take it—as a favor, a small li'l favor to oblige me, Spill."

Spill did not see his way clear to refuse. He reluctantly relinquished Johnny's right arm into the keeping of Jim Mace.

"Thought maybe yuh'd feel better havin' a gent yuh know around," remarked Jim Mace, giving Johnny's biceps a friendly pressure. "How's tricks down on the Lazy?"

"Comin' in bunches," Johnny grinned, winking a cool eye at Jim.

"Say, Tom," observed Jim Mace, leering across at the man on the prisoner's left, "how about sort o' lettin' go entirely o' my friend's arm? It ain't really necessary, you know."

Tom Keen was one of Slay's friends. He wore a hard look and two guns. Nevertheless he followed Jim Mace's suggestion without hesitation.

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"Seein's it's you, Jim, I don't mind none at all," affirmed Tom in the endeavor to save his face. "We all know you."

"Shore yuh do," said Jim Mace with a wicked smile. "We're all for justice an' a quiet life in this town—huh? All right, Dan, we're with yuh."

But they were not with Dan—not just yet. A very pretty girl stepped plump in front of the prisoner and held out her hand. Her breath was coming fast as though she had been running, and her ardent dark eyes were sparkling, and her cheeks were very red.

"How are you, Mister Ramsay?" she said clearly. "Don't you remember me?"

"Do I?" cried Johnny. "Well, say!"

At which the pretty girl blushed redder than ever and the crowd snickered. But little Johnny cared for the crowd. Tactful Jim Mace immediately loosed his grip on Johnny's arm, and the puncher seized the girl's fingers in a fervid grasp.

"I shore am glad to see yuh!" he exclaimed, pumping energetically, and noting with distinct pleasure that the man Slay seemed hugely displeased thereat. "How's yore ma an' pa, Miss Burr?"

"They're all fine. Pa's out on the route just now, an' ma's over at Mis' Acker's on Jack Creek. Soon's Mis' Mace told me you were in trouble I chased young Sammy Barnes out after ma. That's why I was so long getting here. I almost had to fight Sammy to make him do what I wanted. He wanted to see the excitement, the bloodthirsty brat."

"Yuh say yuh sent for yore ma?" demanded the marshal in dismay.

"I certainly did," replied Miss Burr, sharply. "If Sammy's horse doesn't fall down she ought to be here within two hours."

"C'mon!" ordered the marshal, seizing Johnny by the arm. "Get a gait on. We gotta hurry."

"Scared, are yuh, old-timer?" laughed Miss Burr. "I guess you know what'll happen when ma gets here, don't you? Remember what she called you when you played the fool in that Loudon case?"

"You bet he remembers, Dor'thy!" gibed the shrill voice of Mrs. Ragsdale. "Lookit him, gettin' all red. If he'd only wash his face now an' then, he'd get redder."

Which mordant if inelegant jest was salty with truth, for the marshal was a bachelor and careless in his habits. The crowd whooped its appreciation, and the marshal almost broke a tooth in his efforts to maintain a dignified silence.

"Whatsa matter, fellah?" fleered Johnny. "Yore jaw-muscles look like they was a-goin' to bust plumb through yore cheeks. Are yuh mad or somethin'?"

The marshal answered not, and Johnny grinned. His spirits were returning, and in full force. Loyal friends are indeed the best little heart-uplifters in the world.

CHAPTER VI

THE HEMPEN SHADOW

PARADISE BENDERS, so many as could find room, crowded into the Golden Rule at the tail of the little group surrounding Johnny. The disappointed ones filled the open window-spaces with eager heads and shoulders, to the mental anguish of Dave Dusenbury, who feared for his precious panes. But the possible shattering of window-glass was not the only fly in the proprietor's amber. Two boxes of crackers and one of prunes stood invitingly open to the public gaze and hand.

"Them prunes ain't samples!" wailed Dave, diving behind his counter. "They're for sale! They cost money! Take yore hoofs out o' that box, will yuh, Tom? That goes for the crackers too! Here, I'll stick 'em under the counter till court's over."

But half the crackers and most of the prunes had disappeared before Dave was able to sequestrate his property. It was almost a perfect day for the crowd. Soapy Ragsdale cocked a mocking eye at Dan Smith and smiled sweetly. For well he knew that the marshal, in selecting the Golden Rule as the place in which to hold court, had intended thereby to slight him, Soapy, and correspondingly do honor to Dave Dusenbury. Which honor had proved a brisk boomerang and seriously strained an ancient friendship. It was almost a perfect day for Soapy too.

The marshal opened court, constituted himself judge, appointed twelve jurors and lined them up along the counter.

"A jury ain't really necessary," said the marshal; "she's such a plain open-an'-shut case. But we gotta be legal, so pernickety folks'll be satisfied."

"Meanin' me an' Jim, I s'pose," chuckled

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the irrepressible Ragsdale. "Why don't yuh say so right out, 'stead o' climbin' all 'round the stump thisaway?"

"I wasn't namin' no names," was the marshal's lame retort.

"I notice yuh didn't name our names none when yuh picked yore jury," Jim Mace observed drily.

"Well, I'm tryin' to be fair," the marshal explained, "an' you two fellers are the prisoner's friends too much."

"Don't he talk sensible," remarked Johnny. "If Mister Smith tries any harder to be fair he'll strain his conscience or somethin'. An' then where'll he be?"

"Yo're too fresh, young feller," reproved the hard-faced Tom, one of the jurors. "Yuh better talk slow around here—sort o' hogtie yore tongue a few."

"Is that so?" flung back Johnny, anxious to waste all the time he could. "How many gents have you downed?"

"Shut up!" bawled the marshal, hammering with a bung-starter on a barrel of vinegar. "Not another yap out o' you! You don't seem to realize none how nice yo're bein' treated."

"Don't make me laugh," begged Johnny.

"I expect we won't." Grimly from Slay.

"Friend Slant-Eye again," Johnny acknowledged good-humoredly. "You won't never be satisfied till yuh see me hung, will yuh?"

"You better believe I won't!" with enthusiasm.

"It'll shore be a shame to disappoint yuh, Slant-Eye," commiserated Johnny. "Can yuh stand it, do yuh think?"

Such flippancy did not please the crowd. It turned ugly again. But Jim Mace and Soapy Ragsdale faced it down to the marshal's patent disgust. It was apparent that he would welcome almost any quick and sure method of disposing of the prisoner. Miss Burr, wedged in between plump Mrs. Mace, thin Mrs. Ragsdale and a knobby sack of potatoes, smiled reassuringly at Johnny. He grinned back, winked happily, and thrust his tongue into his cheek as Slay began to repeat the story of the crime and the arrest. Even as he had stuck to the truth in the street so now did he stick to the truth in the Golden Rule. But Slay was undeniably clever, and a clever man may give Truth a bit of covering here and there to conceal her nakedness withal, to the end that the lady appears of a totally different aspect. With devilish cunning he so contrived to blend argument and statement of fact that the two were one.

When Slay sat down and tranquilly lit a cigar Johnny perceived that he must fight for his life in harsh earnest. He knew that Jim Mace and Soapy Ragsdale would see it through in the smoke if the verdict went against him, a contingency involving their deaths as well as his own. Two men can not successfully combat a whole town. Johnny, after listening to Slay's remarks, rather doubted the ability of Mrs. Burr to save him. Even if she could she might not arrive in time. Furthermore, it would be humiliating to owe his life to a woman. It will be seen that Johnny's peculiar dilemma presented a more numerous array of horns than nature allots to the average cow.

Johnny stood up on his feet and, taking a long breath, prepared to plunge in. Then he almost laughed aloud, for the way out had opened before him with farcical ease. With unhurried fingers he rolled a cigaret one-handed and snapped a match alight with his thumb-nail. He turned to Jim Mace.

"Jim," he said, "have yuh got that spent shell yuh pumped out o' my Winchester?"

Jim Mace silently handed him the cartridge case. Johnny held the case upright before the eyes of the marshal. Along the length of the brass cylinder ran two bright parallel scratches.

"Yuh seen Jim pump this spent shell out o' my gun, didn't yuh?" asked Johnny.

"Yeah," nodded the marshal.

A quiver of interest rippled through the crowd. Dorothy Burr nudged Mrs. Mace and Mrs. Ragsdale with her elbows, and smiled delightedly.

"He's thought of something," she whispered. "I can see it in his eye."

Her friends smiled back. In common with most women they possessed the instinct for romance, and they sensed in the situation heart-interest a-plenty.

"Would yuh mind pumpin' out the magazine, Jim?" said Johnny.

Jim Mace promptly began to work the lever of the Winchester. Seven loaded shells clattered on the floor. These shells he picked up and held for the marshal to inspect. The jury he had disregarded from the first.

"See, old-timer," observed Johnny, "They's two scratches on the side of each

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one o' these shells, just like they was on the spent shell, ain't they?"

"Yeah." Again the marshal nodded after the fashion of a China mandarin.

"Now I want an unbusted box o' 45-90 cartridges," continued Johnny. Huh? To prove my case. Whatcha guess? No I don't wanna load the rifle myself. I want you to do it. Hurry up with that box. Mister Smith's in a hurry. Here y'are, Mister Smith. Just snick 'round the edge with yore finger-nail, will yuh, an' take the cover off—that's the ticket. Take out six or seven o' them shells an' look at 'em close. Don't see no scratches or nothin', do yuh? All a smooth yaller, ain't they? They are, you admit it. Now load 'em into my rifle an' then pump 'em out."

"Say, what kind o' foolishness is this?" snarled the marshal, "loadin' an' unloadin' yore Winchester thisaway? Djuh think I'm a idjit?"

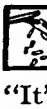
"I know yuh are, old-timer," Johnny replied calmly. "Yuh needn't apologize. I know yuh can't help it. S'pose now yuh do what I say like a good fellah."

The "good fellah," amid the happy chortlings of the mercurial crowd, slowly stuffed half-a-dozen cartridges through the loading-gate into the magazine.

"Pump 'em out an' look at 'em," commanded Johnny. The marshal obeyed.

"See them twin scratches now," cried Johnny triumphantly. "Every last one's got 'em, ain't they? Shore they have. My loadin'-gate's nicked, an' every shell yuh stick in gets scratched thataway."

"What's that got to do with yore killin' o' Old Man Fane an' Bill Homan?" demanded the marshal.



"SHE'S got a li'l bit to do with provin' I didn't kill Old Man Fane an' Bill Homan," retorted Johnny. "It'll be hard to prove it to yuh—yo're so half-witted, but I'll do my li'l old best. Yuh remember what I said about shootin' at the jiggers crossin' the Yellow Medicine right after I heard them three shots. I said I shot twice, didn't I? All right. Yuh got the spent shell o' one o' them shots. Jim Mace pumped her out o' my rifle. The other shell yuh'll find near a cottonwood about ten feet from the place where Old Man Fane's buckboard is standin' in the trail. That's the only shell o' mine yuh'll find anywhere around there.

"An' as I had a steady rest against that cottonwood with my back to the road when I cut down on them three gents yuh'll find the spent shell between the cottonwood an' the road. It ought to be plain to yuh from that I didn't bushwhack Fane. If I had I'd 'a' been behind the cottonwood an' the spent shell would 'a' been between the tree an' the river. Then again yuh'll find the marks o' my heels where I stood when I fired. I remember the ground was soft, an' they sunk. An' them heelmarks 'll be on the buckboard side o' the cottonwood."

"Aw, we ain't got no time for that!" objected the hard-faced Tom.

"That's shore hard luck," mourned Johnny, "but I don't wanna be hung none, so I'll just go on an' finish my li'l piece—if yuh haven't any objection. I wouldn't want to do nothin' to make yuh mad or nothin'. Me bein' a orphan I gotta be careful what I do an'——"

"G'on! G'on!" snapped the marshal.

"Why shore," assented Johnny. "I was just goin' to say that the lead that killed Old Man Fane an' Bill Homan an' the hoss all come from above an' from the other side o' the road. I dunno neither o' them men personal, but I take it that Old Man Fane was the gent with the white beard—yeah, he was, huh? All right, the bullet that killed Old Man Fane went in above the right temple, come out below the left ear an' grazed his left shoulder. The other feller was shot plumb through the temple, the bullet come out o' his neck, an' buried itself in his left shoulder.

"I dunno nothin' about the hoss 'ceptin' he was drilled back o' the ear. I didn't take notice where the bullet went after that. Now I'm gamblin' that behind the rocks scrouged in between two pines a-growin' maybe twenty—thirty feet up the side o' the hill where she's good an' steep yuh'll find three spent shells without any scratches on 'em. Maybe yuh won't. Them fellers might not 'a' pumped 'em out, but it'd be a heap natural for 'em to pump 'em out, bein' road-agents an' likely to need their Winchesters quick an' in a hurry.

"Say! here's somethin' I didn't think of before: yuh know she's kind o' hard to judge the size of a bullet by the hole she makes in a gent—the flesh is too ragged, but the hole in Bill Homan's hat was a mite smaller than the hole in Old Man Fane's. *An' the lead's still in Homan's shoulder.* Dig

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her out, an' I'll gamble the limit yuh'll find she's 40-65 or 38 or somethin' like that. It's a cinch she ain't as big as mine, an' mine's the reg'lar 45-90. There y'are, Mister Smith. Yore proof is right in an' near that buckboard. Fly at it."

The marshal frowned. The jury and crowd did more than frown. They voiced immediate objections. Which was natural. An investigation of Johnny's side of the question would have been a rank departure from long-established methods of procedure. What was all this talk of bullet-holes and shooting from above and so forth? Foolishness! Hadn't Harry Slay told a straight and conclusive story?

Of course he had. Hell's bells, what more did the road-agent want? He was unreasonable, that's what he was. Hadn't other men found in less criminal circumstances been hung at sight? Custom dies hard. Besides, it was nearly twenty miles to the Yellow Medicine, and it was a hot day.

The marshal glanced warily at Jim Mace and Soapy Ragsdale, for he had an uneasy feeling that, in the event of hostilities, he would be the first to die. Still—the marshal coughed impressively and, while affecting to scratch his hip-bone, fingered the butt of his six-shooter.

"Gents," said the marshal, addressing the jury, "y'all heard what Harry Slay said. Y'all heard what this feller said. What do you say?"

"Yes, gents, what do you say?" drawled an unexcited voice from the doorway. "I'd shore admire to hear."

The marshal's jaw dropped with almost an audible click. He at once withdrew his hand from his gun butt and ran a worried finger 'round the inside of his collar. Miss Burr laughed with an almost hysterical joy.

"Hello, Scotty!" called Johnny.

"Howdy, Johnny! I'll get to yuh in a li'l while. Hello, Dave. Seems crowded in here to-day. Trade a-boomin', huh?"

Scotty Mackenzie, eight of his riders in his wake, forced his way through the press. The jurors looked uncomfortable. The hard-featured Tom began to fidget. Ganey of the dyed mustache swallowed his chew and nearly strangled. Slay's friends quickly assumed their most innocent expressions. Slay himself appeared to be unmoved. He watched Scotty's approach with lazy eyes. The units comprising the remainder of the assemblage looked at one another and shifted their feet if not their opinions.

Scotty and his boys shook hands with Johnny and gravely asked how he did. Of the nine men Scotty Mackenzie had the least inspiring presence. He was dilapidated with a startling completeness. His boots were ancient, sadly run over at the heels, and cut about the tops. His trousers were patched at one knee and ripped at the other. His vest was gone at the armholes and a pocket or two had fetched away. His blue flannel shirt had faded to a sickly green in many places. A large hole yawned in the crown of his flappy-brimmed hat, and through a smaller hole in the side his grizzled hair protruded.

Scotty wore a chin whisker and his features had been built with a view to service in the missionary field. But the effect of this mild, bland face was nullified by a pair of bright blue eyes that could, on occasion, become hard and fierce with a hardness and a fierceness usually associated with that interesting animal, the Bengal tiger. No indeed, Scotty Mackenzie was distinctly not a person to monkey with.

At the present moment Scotty was standing with his wiry legs planted well apart and was smiling pleasantly at the marshal. The latter had never seen a Bengal tiger, so he thought of the timber-wolf instead. Scotty was a smaller man than the marshal, but somehow the marshal felt that he was looking up to Scotty. Dan Smith was no coward. He was not actually afraid of Scotty, yet he wished from the bottom of his heart that he had taken the prisoner's part a little more.

"I'm clean forgettin' the jury," Scotty drawled apologetically, and pivoted on one heel. "Gents, yuh was goin' to say somethin' when I got here. What was it?"

"They was just a-goin' to move to adjourn over to the Yaller Medicine about twenty miles," put in the marshal. "Seems like they's some evidence there we gotta look at before decidin' this case."

"Oh, yeah," said Scotty. "Guess the boys an' me'll sort o' trail along. We ain't busy a li'l bit. Yuh see, I was standin' in that doorway a good ten minutes before anybody seen me."

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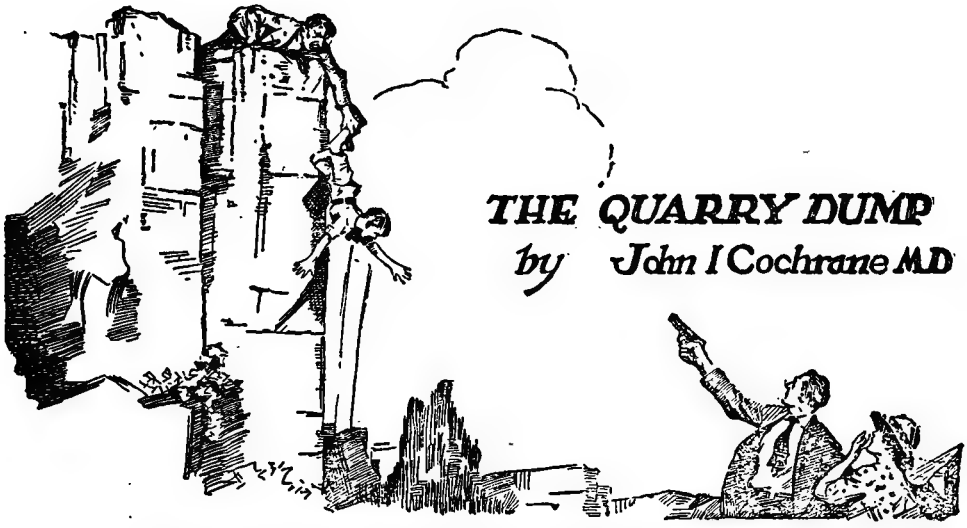

THE QUARRY DUMP

by John I Cochrane MD

Author of "The Crimson Chamber," "Dan Wheeler—Manhandler," etc.

"DAR-R-RN such a place! Place is dead—dead 'n buried!"

Wash slung sugar-scoop into sugar-bin with one hand, with the other yanked the bag of sugar from the scales, and addressed an empty store—"the store" and post-office of Fentonville, Vermont. Through the open door the empty village street shimmered in the sun, its after-dinner hush broken only by the far-off whirr of a mowing-machine. In the little back office Uncle Lem Jones slumbered sweetly with the *Berrytown Weekly Banner* over his face.

"Nothin' ever has happened here," Wash went on to state. "Nothin' ever will happen—not ever!"

Boredom and much dinner, had driven Wash to over-statement and false prophecy. The last year, since the death of old Major Fenton, had been an exciting year for Fentonville. Moreover, even as Wash bent over his order-book on the counter he was startled upright.

"Good evening, Washington Jefferson Perkins!" said a deep, severe voice. "How's the war, and the Kaiser—and, if so, why?"

In the door stood Larry Stiles, in khaki and moccasins, a model for a bronze minute-man. With level eyes he held Wash dumb while he took three noiseless strides, tossed a dime on the counter and picked up the plug Wash passed out, seated himself on the opposite counter and bit off a chew. Deliberately ruminant, he pocketed the slab on his hip, plumped a center-shot into the sawdust-box behind the stove, rolled the quid into a smooth, lean cheek:

"Now, Wash, I'm your meat—'This place is dead—dead 'n buried!' You go on from there and tell us about it. What's the latest about your hero, Mis-ter Marshall? Goin' to leave us—is he?"

"Hm!" Wash jerked himself about to fumble among the canned goods. "I guess it'll be dead enough, now't the work's all done up 't the Castle. Only job that's brought a dollar int' the place since the quarries shut down. Thought you'd be down the crick, now 't you got through on the hill. What's matter? Ain't they jumpin'? Or are ye——"

"No-o," Larry drawled, gravely interrupting. "No, Wash—I ain't drinkin' and water's too low for a fly. Been over on Birch Ridge—somebody's saltin' deer—but I didn't see anything of your Mis-ter Marshall. I thought you'd be some worried—not seein' those cute little panties for much 's a whole day—I don't see how ye stan' it, Wash!"

"What you got agin 'im—besides his britches?" Wash having dared so far went on—"You're the only man in the place that's down on 'im—forever slammin' them ridin'-pants in my face. What they got to do with a man——"

Wash stopped because he did not see his way out of the sentence, and because he was afraid of Larry, as he had been

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ever since the older man had taught him to shoot and cast a fly. Larry was of the chilled-steel stock that New England furnished the West as material for her leaders and desperadoes, for bad men and marshals, and he looked it.

His were the cold-blue eyes that knew neither fear nor defeat, the clean-cut ample features that stood for breadth and power, and men possessing eyesight and judgment forebore to stir him up. In his youth he had been beyond the Rockies, and it was whispered that his well-oiled Colt was entitled to notches. In any case, Larry Stiles commanded more than respect in his own country, and few dared speak to him as Wash had spoken. He was looking at the little clerk with grim good-nature.

"Me down on 'im—who says?" he inquired.

"Me—anybody. Wa'n't you the only man that wouldn't work for 'im up 't the Castle 'til Miss Norma asked ye, as a favor to her? Ain't you kep' outa his way. An' let any man say his name an' you take a slam at them britches. By gosh! I b'lieve you're jealous!"

Wash concluded, seeing the little wrinkles 'round Larry's eyes. The instant the words were out Wash gasped, as if trying to recapture and swallow the sounds.

For the clap of silence that fell thereupon was stupefying. Larry's face paled and his thin lips moved as if they hurt—

"Me jeal—why, you little——"

"Jealous 'cause he can beat ye shootin'—with a Colt!" Wash jabbered, terror-driven. "He spattered six eggs tossed all to once, but prob'bly he ain't so good with a rifle. I wa'n't tryin' to git fresh, Larry—it don't—you—wh-wh-why, what d'you think I meant?"

Wash got his breath back, for Larry had resumed his chewing, a slow flush passing over his face and slowly fading. When the older man spoke it was in a lower tone:

"Never mind, Wash. So you haven't heard the news? The man you call Mr. Marshall rode off on his calico mare last night, and hasn't been seen yet. His trunk's on the platform over 't the Junction, checked for Denver, and—Miss Norma was still in her room, at dinner-time."

With the last low words, again the thin lips stiffened, showing the edge of strong even teeth. Again there was a horrible silence.

Fentonville's feeling for Norma Donelson was a fracture of the first commandment, and after much pother it had been settled that she and Marshall might—must marry. Now, if the young Virginian had won her heart only to break it. . . .

If the old major had made his will as he had promised and intended to do, Norma and her little brother Dick would have had about a million; instead of which they were penniless orphans, while the estate went to a young Virginia Fenton whom Fentonville had never seen.

Wild stories came to the little village, concerning the heir-at-law, stories of duels in college days, of adventures on sea and ranch—also rumors of surpassing charm of person and manners. One thing was a certainty, that the young villain already had more money than was good for him—"He's a Fenton, all right!" So the final verdict was that he be found not guilty, provided he show up promptly and marry the princess of the blood.

Then Fentonville got another shock. Came a letter from the heir, from his ranch in Colorado, saying he was "sending a poor cousin, Jay Marshall of Roanoke, with full powers and authority."

It concluded by asking Uncle Lem, acting manager interregnum, to beseech the "people of Fentonville to suspend judgment, and not tar-and-feather poor Marshall."

THUS handicapped, Marshall had appeared riding a real pinto cow-pony into the valley by way of the "Notch ro'd," the "spit 'n image" of the Fenton heir himself. Indeed, the first question before the store senate was whether he was to be allowed to be himself or his wealthy cousin, Fenton. However, within the busy year while he was building the Castle, he had won not only the right to his name, but the way into the hearts of all Fentonville.

He won even the approval of his suit to the *girl*, with whom he fell in love at sight. He had the place behind him to a man, with the exception of Larry Stiles. Larry had consistently kept aloof from Marshall and all his works, and now it began to look as if Larry were the true prophet, the one man with a clear understanding of all the perplexing muddle. Even Wash felt his faith slipping cogs as he reviewed the situation—and his protest was weak:

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"B-b-but Mr. Marshall wouldn't do a thing like that. He's a—he's a—he's a——"

Wash was known as a "stutterer," but his was not the usual ragtime repeating yammer. It was more a cramp or spasm in utterance that in times of stress stopped him short at a given point. Red, gasping and swallowing, he took a fresh running start only to bump against the same unyielding wall, while the beholder clenched his fists and broke into a cold sweat of sympathy. When at length he did break through, he came out with a wee soft voice more startling than a yell. Larry waited, chewing steadily the while.

"He's a—he's a—he's a—*gentleman.*"

Wash drew a long breath of relief.

"Sure! And we're only 'natives,' " said Larry. "We don't count. But all the same I wouldn't advise Marshall—or whatever his name is—to clear out right now and leave Miss Norma in the lurch. I wouldn't advise him to. If he hasn't got away already, the only way he'll get to the Junction will be in a pine box—with the cover screwed down."

Wash looked away from the cold-blue eyes, looked all around the familiar store to make sure he was awake. This was the sort of thing you read in yellowbacks. His stomach felt as if the bottom had dropped out.

"I wouldn't talk that way," he protested, "it ain't—it ain't funny. If you say you're goin' to shoot a man, you can be—you can be——"

"Say I was goin' to shoot anybody, did I, Wash?"

"You said he'd go out in a box, if he——"

"M-hm!" Larry contributed copiously to the sawdust-box. "So I did. Saw Sim Leach on Birch Ridge this mornin', Wash."

"No! Git aout!"

Wash had stood with a can of tomatoes in his hand. He now dropped it. Comprehension came with a flash and brought immense relief.

"Gosh! I thought f'r a minute you was crazy, or somethin'. So Sim's got back again—pret' nigh a year since he run away from the 'sylum—I 'spose he's—but, say! Was he—did Sim say he was goin' t' shoot Mr. Marshall? Or——"

Wash made one of his inconclusive pauses.

"He did, and I rise to remark he'll come —— near doin' it," Larry replied.

"He generally has, so far."

"But—but what for? Mad because his old shack was tore down, is 'e?"

"M-hm!" Larry assented carelessly. "So he says, but one excuse 's as good 's another when Sim's makin' war-medicine—got some other reason hatched up by this time, prob'bly. Remember the time he chased the Haskins kids with a butcher-knife 'cause he'd got to wash his hands in 'innocent blood?'"

Wash was getting more worried.

"Well, I guess! But you oughta told him Mr. Marshall wa'n't to blame—he bid in the old shell with the buildin'-lot when 't was sold f'r taxes, and got it outa sight—he was only doin' it for the owner. Didn't ye tell Sim that Marshall was jest carryin' out orders—that Marshall wa'n't the real owner—what?"

"No."

Calmly Larry rolled his quid and spat.

"I didn't. I ain't so sure he ain't!"

Wash blinked and refused to reopen this old debate. Larry proceeded to stir him up some more.

"And talk about tellin' Sim anything—y' can't tell a well man anything when he's mad, and when it comes to arguin' with a lunatic! Say! Remember them two Canucks tried to tell Sim they wa'n't the ones 't stole his cider-brandy? Got the seats o' their pants full o' birdshot just the same. Almighty bull-headed, Sim is! Nobody took any stock in it when he said he was goin' to kill Zeke Haskell, but Sim did it. Never was one to go back on a promise, Sim wa'n't, and now I guess he's worse 'n ever."

"How 'd ye mean—worse 'n—worse 'n——"

Wash was excited to the cramping-point, and Larry did not keep him in suspense.

"Worse because he can shoot anybody he wants!" he explained. "He's been judged insane, so all he gets is the 'sylum anyway—and he'll get that when they catch 'im, if he don't do anything!"

"S'pose he's thought o' that?" Wash whispered, pale around the mouth.

"Know he has—" sawdust-box again—"bragged about it—said he'd 'git any —— of'cer 'r any man that tells on him. Got a cinch, Sim has! Say Wash—" Larry stared up the road—"there's Sim now, comin' this way, and a man on horseback behind him! He's ridin' hellety-larrup—

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it's y'r friend Marshall, and he's goin' t' pass Sim, sure—— "

Larry slipped off the counter.

"He'll shoot 'im—holler, stop 'im! hey——!"

"Whoa! Back up and set down!"

Larry caught Wash by the arm, as the little clerk scrambled for the door, falling over scale-scoop and tomato-can.

"Sim don't know him by sight, and ain't got his gun. Marshall—'r whoever he is—'ll be here in half a shake. He's passed Sim now. But listen here, son. Don't you say a word to Marshall 'bout what I've told you—hear?"

"Goshamighty. Let a man get shot, would ye? Leggo me—you're breakin' my arm—yow-wouch!"

"What's all the row!" asked Uncle Lem quietly. Roused by the clatter and Wash's shrill voice, he came from the back office, passing a hand over his sphinx-like face to wipe away the fogs of sleep. He took in the indoor tableau at a glance, then the horseman dismounting at the steps.

Dropping the reins over the head of the blowing mare, Marshall stepped lightly to the door—gracefully, darkly handsome, with a presence of uncommon charm. On his finely bred face there were lines of grim purpose that made it all but cruel. He spoke, however, with unhurried courtesy, in tones deep even for a large man.

"Mr. Jones—good evening, sir, gentlemen!"

He acknowledged the other two with a slow nod; his look never left Uncle Lem.

"May I have a word with you, sir?"

"You certainly may—this way, please—after you——"

Passing between Wash and Larry with a graceful half-bow of recognition and apology, the Southerner removed his hat in deference to the bare leonin poll of his host; with "I thank you, sir!" preceded him into the little office, and the door closed behind them.

Wash watched every move with admiration, and turned to Larry.

"Darn likely he'd travel under another name—a man like that. What sense in such a fool trick—say, how'd he fix it with Uncle Lem about his mail if his name wa'n't Marshall?"

Larry seemed not to hear, was staring at the closed door in a way that made Wash shiver. He blurted desperately:

"Don't do that! You got me so nerved up now, 't I—what's got into ye, Larry? If you got anything against Mr. Marshall, why don't ye——?"

"So that's the feller! Goes 'round tearin' daown haouses, does 'e?"

WASH literally jumped from the floor as he flashed 'round toward the door. Leach was a gorilla-built animal with a greasy face that wore an expression of furtive obstinacy, at once deprecating and sneakily threatening. His long shiny nose stuck out ahead, sneaking, searching, while his close-set piggy eyes dodged and darted unceasingly. Now he was smiling, a fawning, cringing half-smile that showed long wolf teeth, a near-snarl.

"How-de-do, Wash! H'w are ye, Larry?"

He spoke in a nasal, whispery whine. Larry turned from glaring at the office door, and his set face softened strangely. He spoke as one speaks to an amusing child.

"Hel-lo, Simmy! How be ye? How's things? Shot any woodchucks lately?"

Wash held his breath, for it was said that Leach ate woodchucks, and he might be touchy on the subject. But Larry knew his man. Wrinkles came 'round the piggy eyes, making the suspicious face look almost human, as Sim answered:

"Uh-huh, ye-us, shot a few. Nice 'n fat naow. Wash, got any 30-30 cartridges, soft-nose? I guess I'll take a box."

"Tear a woodchuck up some, won't they, Sim?" asked Larry.

Leach did not answer at once. He had turned his back to get his money from his pants-pocket, and was fumbling it jealously under cover of his ragged coat. He at length put a dirty bill on the counter, pocketed his shells and his change in the same secretive fashion, then looked over his shoulder with a slanting leer.

"Mebbe. Mebbe some o' the two-legged ones need tearin' up, so't they wunt do s'much tearin' daown!"

A snarling grin at his own pretty wit, and plodding to the door Leach flung over his shoulder one more evil look as he half whispered—

"Mebbe they wunt!"

He was gone, passing 'round the corner of the store.

"Something has got to be done—right off!" announced Wash, "I'm goin' to tell

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Uncle Lem, 'n have him phone the sheriff to come right over."

"Mallory!" Larry sniffed his contempt. "Sim scared Mallory out of a year's growth last time. It took Mallory a week hangin' 'round with a posse to catch Sim out without that sawed-off shotgun. And now 't Sim's got a high-power rifle you couldn't git Mallory this side the mountain t' save your neck. Stop trampin' 'round and fallin' over that brass scoop. I'll 'tend to this business after I've seen Miss Norma —I ain't so —— sure I want Sim shut up just yet."

"She gener'ly goes for a walk with Dick about now," said Wash. "But say, what's Miss Norma got to do with Sim? What if——"

"Shut up," said Larry. "I got to think and you talk too much with your mouth."

He dropped his head in his hands, got up and went to the door to see which way Leach had gone, nodded and returned to his seat on the counter. Encountering Wash's look of blankness, he added—

"It's none of your business, anyhow."

"None of my business," squeaked Wash, "when you—I—well—my—gosh."

He finished in weak collapse, and made a vague movement as if to pick up the brass scoop, muttering—

"Ever see such a blame mess?"

He may have alluded to his mental condition. Before he had grasped either the scoop or the general situation a clear child-voice outside called:

"Nummie—Num-mie! Here is Lawwy. Come and ask him—he knows most ever'thing. Wight in the store, here——"

And by the hand Dick dragged his big sister into the store. He was a lovely cherub in white duck, a delight to the eye, but his sister was more than that.

Larry slid to his feet, hat off, and swallowed his chew. Wash attempted to face about, pick up the scoop, and get behind the counter all at once, while determined to treat his eyes to a good look at the girl. The resulting figure he cut was quaint.

She was no doll-beauty, no frail ethereal spirit, nor was she the magazine-cover athlete, although she was nearer the latter type. You looked at her, drew a full free breath, then held it when she spoke. For she gave you a sensation of breadth, of warm, loyal womanhood as sweet as her low rich voice, as full as her rounded breasts. It was a shock to find that she was almost perfect in physical beauty; it was too much.

Before you could finish cataloging details, such as warm rose-leaf skin, and wide, level brows over hazel eyes, she opened a generous mouth and the deep sweet voice immediately seized your attention.

The sweet understanding of the smile she gave her two subjects, although Wash was still falling over the scoop, had no alloy of derision or condescension. It was pure golden affection and understanding. She knew their selfless, hopeless devotion for the big thing that it was, and she was humbly grateful. Moreover, she made no attempt to conceal from them that she had been crying and was still sad or sorry. It trembled in her voice.

"We want to go to the Quarry Dump and get some swamp pinks—and we must get back to supper," she began without formal greeting. "Can it be done, Larry? Dick simply has to go to the Quarry—he has an appointment—and I want the view as much as the flowers."

Her smile was wistful.

"He's the bigges' fwog 't ever was, I guess," Dick announced, eagerly looking up into Larry's face, but Larry was absorbedly watching the girl's every shade of expression while he mechanically answered her question.

"There's swamp pinks just back of the quarry, up in the pasture, not more'n five rod from the top o' the back-wall. But y' won't have time to go around the end o' the cliff to get up there—it's a mile by the ro'd—y' want to put Dick on the ladder and let him get 'em."

"Ladder? Can't I get up? I'm afraid he'll fall?

She flushed slightly as she realized that Larry was reading her face, and he flushed in sympathy as he responded:

"No, don't y' try it; it's rickety and the two bottom cleats busted off. But it's short—you can hang on to Dick almost to the top—it's on top of a big pile of rubbish against the left-hand wall, as you go into the old shaft. You just see 't he keeps back from the top o' the wall and he can get 'em all right. Can't you, old man?"

"Uh-huh," Dick agreed absently, then got to weightier matters. "But Lawwy, he's the mos' huge-ous big bull-fwog, lives in the water in the quawwy. He sits on

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his tummy on a wock in the water, an' you can't make him wink. He jus' sits and sits. D' you know him, Lawwy?"

"Do I know him?"

Larry gave the topic his intensely serious attention. He could be trusted to understand always what things really were important, and not to chatter grown-up foolishness, hence he was a prince among all children. He spoke as man to man, and just now with scornful emphasis:

"Know that felluh? Say, he 'n I are old chums; know him 's well 's I know you, ever since we was polliwogs. That lad's name's McGunnigle, and sir, that Micky McGunnigle's the cham-peen first-bass singer of the U-nited States of America. Yes, sir. To hear him tunin' up sounds like a big bass-drum. Know him? Well I rather guess. We're thick 's thieves—almost twins. Some folks say we look just alike. Do we—think?"

"M-hm, and listen!"

Dick's eyes were dark with excitement.

"I heard him sing too, an' he says—'jug o' rum' plain as you can."

An instant of silence was broken by a cavernous snort from the depths of the cracker-barrel, where Wash had dived at the mention of Larry's favorite beverage.

"Ouch!"

Larry grinned and met the frankly laughing face of the girl.

FOR the moment she had lost the sadness that lurked behind her eyes and flashed out her own sunny sweetness. Then came a sound from the back office, the harsh scrape of a chair pushed back, followed by the rumble of a deep voice just the other side of the closed door. Although no words were distinct, the rich low tones were unmistakable. It was the voice of the young Southerner.

All light vanished from the girl's face. A look of fear she cast over her shoulder.

"Come now, Dickyman, we must start right away. Thank Larry for us both. Now we're off."

Although she was white about the lips, she did not forget to look a beseeching farewell with her large hazel eyes to both men. Then hand in hand she and Dick hurried out through the side door. There came back to the interior of the store, now suddenly dark and dingy, the clear treble protest:

"But, Num-mie. I didn't say anyfing not nice, did I? He does sit wight on his tummy! He jus' sits——"

"Smarter'n a steel trap, that kid!"

Wash turned to Larry, agrin with admiration, to get another jolt. For Larry stood crouched as if to spring upon the office door, and his hands were clutching at his sides. He seemed unconscious of Wash, and he looked, Wash later testified, "like the old scratch himself."

The door was opening now, and Larry turned away to straighten his features.

"Those things for the Castle put up, Wash?" asked Uncle Lem, appearing alone in the doorway.

"Ye-ah. B-b-but——"

"Then take 'em right up." Uncle Lem spoke with quiet restraint, always.

"B-b-but I wa—I wa—I wa——"

Wash was trying to tell about Sim Leach.

"I think," Uncle Lem now spoke hardly above a whisper, "I'd take 'em up now."

When the old lion spoke that way it was not in Wash to disobey. With a look at Larry that besought him to tell the story, Wash yanked the delivery-hamper off the counter, kicked the screen-door open, and by the side-entrance departed to the store-shed where old Kate stamped and switched flies. When the wagon rattled off up the hill road, Uncle Lem spoke to Larry.

"Was that Sim Leach I saw go past the office-window?"

"Sim went out o' here a spell ago."

"I guess I'll phone Hen McLean to come over and get him, right now." Uncle Lem turned toward the office. "Finished signing those papers, Mr. Marshall?"

"Just finished, yes, sir."

Marshall came out of the little room, pulling on his riding-gauntlets. Uncle Lem stepped aside and turned to Larry, about to speak when Larry broke in—

"Hen ain't sheriff any longer."

"No," Uncle Lem answered calmly, "but he's the man to take Sim—done it twice, and Hen promised the superintendent of the asylum to take Sim any time he showed up. Hen will do it. But I have a word to say to you boys—you and Marshall, here—and you'll do well to listen and govern yourself accordingly. I want you to get together. You will both be sorry if you don't, because somebody else will be hurt—somebody you don't want to hurt will be hurt, and hurt bad. Remember

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that when you feel your pride or pig-headedness getting the best of ye."

It was a long speech for Uncle Lem, town oracle, and he spoke very impressively. As he finished, he stepped to the door.

"Here's Mis' Hibbard, hot on the scent of news! Suppose you two step up the hill road a ways, where you won't be disturbed, and see 'f you can't get things straightened out."

Larry nodded without looking at Marshall.

"I'll slip out the side door and cut 'cross to the ro'd where it goes into the woods."

And he vanished without a sound. Uncle Lem laid a hand on Marshall's sleeve, for him an extreme demonstration, as he charged him for the last time:

"Don't forget what may happen if you two go up in the air, and remember about holding down your pride. Larry may not follow the fashions in tailors or talk, but he's not what you'd call 'common' in any sense, and he comes of a family full as old as the Fentons, if not the Marshalls. You'll take this from an old man?"

"I will, sir, and thank you!"

There was vibrant feeling in the deep voice, looking from the man's deep, dark eyes. Uncle Lem watched him out of the store, saw him walk up the hill road with the pony's bridle over his arm before he turned back to the phone with a sigh—

"Now for poor Simmy."

II

LARRY and Marshall stood facing each other in the shady woods-smelling arcade made by the tops of the young birches, beeches and maples that met over the Old Quarry road. Here they were out of sight from the store, and here they had come in silence, Marshall walking with his pony's bridle over his arm. Having rounded the first turn in the grass-grown road, they stopped by unspoken agreement. For still another minute they stood eye-to-eye before speaking.

So standing, they were perfect types of the two main sources of America's best manhood: Marshall, the proud and aristocratic cavalier, and Stiles, the dour and grim Puritan. Tense with virile antagonism as they were, each conceived a new respect for the other in this, their first direct encounter.

Marshall sensed the dangerous power of the man before him, and Larry admired the youthful dignity as well as the clean comeliness of the young Virginian. Though he was ready for any man-to-man clash, Larry felt that a scuffle with this man was not on the cards. "As soon think of goin' to the mat with George Washington himself!" was how he would have expressed the grim humor astir within him.

The Virginian spoke first:

"Mr. Stiles, I expect to be gone six months, and Miss Donelson will take charge of the new house while I am away. I want a man to look after things out-of-doors, a sort of manager or head forester. That is what he will be paid for, but his real job will be to take care of Miss Nor— Miss Donelson—particularly on her long walks—and see that no harm comes to her, without her knowing that she is shadowed. Mr. Jones tells me you are the one man for the job. Will you take it?"

By not so much as the quiver of an eyelash did Larry show his surprise, or his approval of the other's fearless directness. There was no soft spot in this man, he felt. If this man did wrong he would do it because he wanted to do it, and he would make a good job of it. He would not be driven by others, or by his own uncontrolled passions. He could be a friend worth having or a dangerous enemy. If, therefore, he was acting like a cad toward Miss Norma. . . .

A sudden surge of cold rage rose within the older man at the thought. He recalled the things that had looked strange. Marshall had spoken as if he owned the Fenton property. . . .

"Who owns all that?"

As Larry exploded the savage question he pointed to the Castle on its foothill, visible between the slender tree-boles, but his eyes never turned from Marshall's face.

"I do."

"Then your right name's Fenton?"

"No. My name is Jay Marshall."

Larry waited, and Marshall explained—

"I bought it before I had been here a week."

"What for?" Larry thrust his face forward, eyes narrowed.

"Because I found I liked it. And because I saw that Miss Donelson, in designing the interior and furnishings, was sure to get fond of it."

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"Ye-e-es!"—a prolonged contemptuous snarl—"So you're another of 'em."

Marshall flushed, but pressed tight his lips, determined not to be provoked into angry response. Larry went on, thin lips acurl:

"You're another one—one of the rotten rich, like those fat-necked old boars in New York that drove Miss Norma out of the city—only you were willing to pay a higher price. So that was the price you offered, for a girl like her."

At the lashing contempt and disgust in the last five whispered words Marshall breathed fast and turned white, but Larry saw before him only Norma's pursuer, and he was seeing red. All Pickett's Division couldn't stop him now. He seemed to stand a foot taller as he straightened up and slowly said:

"Now I am goin' to ask you one more question, before I tell you something. Maybe you won't believe me when I tell you it'll depend on what you answer whether you live to get out of Vermont or not. But—you—better—believe it, and believe it good and hard!"

With the last words his heavy fist crashed into his own open hand three times, then both heavy hands swung at his sides as if he were about to jump. Still his steel-blue eyes bored into the other's face.

"What are you going to do about her when you come back?"

Marshall waited for three breaths, to get control of his voice, and even then there was a tremor in the deep tones as he began—

"I'd not take this only—I understand you've been a sort of foster-father—perhaps you have a sort of a right to ask."

After a tense moment he became more steady, and regained his quiet manner.

"I hope to marry Miss Donelson. For the present she refuses me and insists on six months' probation—then I am to come back for——"

"Pardon me, but will you say that again?" asked Larry shakily, but with formal elegance of diction, "I'm not sure I heard that straight. D'you say she refused to marry you? Asked her—did ye?"

"Of course I asked her—how else——"

"Say it straight out, did ye? In so many words, so't she couldn't fail to understand what y'meant?"

Now Larry was panting with excitement, his anger all oozed out. Marshall's expression for the first time showed alarm and astonishment as he protested—

"Cert'nly I did—how else——"

"Dead sure you said it? Think, man."

"What else could she th—oh, my—Lord—Almighty!"

Marshall stared at Larry and spoke in a whisper of horror as he got his meaning. Then he flashed out a protest.

"She couldn't—she'd know. No man with a grain of decency could be such a cur."

His deep voice broke.

"It—it isn't done."

"Ain't it? And why couldn't she think it?" Larry was grimly sarcastic. "Think it over. Driven out of New York because three men—top-notchers, passed the plate on Sundays, three 'gentlemen'—tried the same game. All of 'em married, at that." Larry waxed warmer. "The last one was a proper three-ply saint. He was the thoroughbred aristocrat that threatened to ruin her—put lies in the papers if she turned him down. Then she comes up here—maybe *you* used the same words.

"Say, listen here. I was dead sure you wasn't on the square with her, and I was ready to shoot you myself, in case—I ain't so —— sure yet——"

Marshall interrupted hurriedly:

"Cert'nly, you would, of course. I'd do it myself. Listen you, will you shake hands? No? Well, you wouldn't, so soon, but time's short——"

He turned to pass the reins over the pony's head, one hand on the pommel.

"Where is she now—which way? Quick!"

"Straight up—Quarry Dump—but wait. You want—I may have to shoot——"

"Let go that rein."

Marshall vaulted to the saddle, wheeled his mount on two legs, drove his spurs home and shouted over his shoulder—

"Shoot and be ——!"

LARRY watched the horse and rider disappear 'round the first turn of the sun-dappled road, heard the drum of hoofs die away. A nervy little chipmunk stuck his head out of the stone wall to voice a shrill insult. Larry answered gravely!

"Sure! We all make 'em, and I was young once myself. He can ride a hoss!"

The chipmunk flirted himself out of sight at the sound of a rattling wagon. Through

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the slender saplings Larry saw Wash returning from the Castle, along the private road that forked from the one in which he himself stood. Wash was standing up and lashing old Kate with the ends of the reins, while the old mare was giving a fair imitation of a horse running.

"Wash wants to get somewhere—something 's sure happened."

Running down hill at an easy lope Larry reached the fork first, and ran alongside the delivery-wagon in order to swing aboard. But, by the time he had climbed in, Wash was dragging on the reins.

"Don't stop 'er! She may balk any minute!" he called to Wash as he squatted in the box.

"Let 'er balk—I was lookin' f'r you—Whoa, you ol' hellion—Sim Leach must 'a' hid his Winchester under th' bridge. He started off the other way to fool us. I see 'im a minnit ago sneakin' up through Bascom's Woods. He's headed f'r the Gray Ledge, where Miss Norma and Dick——"

"Gimme those reins!"

Larry sprang up and seized them. As he swung the free ends he let out his tremendous shouting-voice:

"Hey-yup, git out o' this." *Swack!* "Wash." *Swack!* "Where's y'r rifle, the little 25 I sold ye?" *Swack!* "Git!" *Swack!* "Git!"

The old mare started with a jump that did her credit, and landed running.

"Down 't the store," shouted Wash, flat on his back in the wagon-bottom.

As they clattered crazily down toward the village, Wash sat up and grabbed the sides.

"Put the leather to 'er," he yelled, as they bounded over the "thank-you-ma'ams."

Larry put the leather to her and the old mare began to get interested. Balancing like a Roman charioteer Larry called over his shoulder:

"Got no time to go t' my house. When we make the store fall off an' git the rifle and some shells—hear?"

"Yep."

They rounded the turn, passed the side-door of the store, and Wash rolled out behind as directed. Larry landed on his feet further on and made the "front stoop" in one jump while the old mare cantered to the barn across the road and jammed the wagon in the stable door.

Uncle Lem looked up over his spectacles at Larry, as the latter coolly entered the store talking fast and clearly.

"Sim's up 't the Gray Ledge. Did ye git McLean on the 'phone? Comin' in his big car?"

"Yes, with two deputies."

Uncle Lem rose as he spoke, and started for the 'phone—

"What shall I tell him?"

"To turn off 't the watering-trough and leave the car at the old Bascom Quarry. Tell him to post his men in the woods above the ledge, back o' the Gray Ledge Quarry—got it?"

Uncle Lem nodded as he rang Central.

"If he's started from the Junction I'll get him somewhere along the road."

Wash handed to Larry just then a neat little squirrel rifle and a handful of cartridges, but before starting Larry removed the cleaning-rod.

"Kept 'er oiled?" he asked solicitously.

"You bet. Wiped 'er out every night sence you sold 'er to me—not a speck ever been in——"

"Monkeyed with the sights, have ye?" Larry interrupted keenly.

"No sir-ree. Think I'm a darn fool? You said yourself it was sighted to a hair——"

But Larry was gone, swinging up the road with the long, sagging stride of the hill man. From the door Wash saw him disappear in the woods before he sought consolation from his tower of strength and source of wisdom.

"Sim's got some head-start of 'im," said Wash, as Uncle Lem hung up. "S'pose Larry tries to head 'im off—an' Sim gets mad? What if Sim sees 'im first and shoots Larry at long range—he's got a 30-30 Winchester.

"Would 'e—think?"

"Never c'n tell what Sim 'll do."

Placidly donning spectacles and spreading his paper, Uncle Lem surveyed the headlines with the calm remark:

"No use worrying. Better catch old Kate and unhitch 'er—she's warm."

III

"THE QUARRY DUMP" is an ugly name for a glorious thing. From the valley below it looks like an ash-heap on the mountain's broad green slope; but climb for an hour up the steep

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winding road and you come out of the woods at the Dump's very foot, there to look up and lose what little breath you have left. For you stand close under a mountain of large marble blocks, each one man-high, that towers up, up, up and away to its rounded rim swimming dizzily against the floating clouds, higher than the great pyramids, ten times higher than the tallest trees.

To reach the top you once more climb a steep road that mounts by a horse-shoe curve to the left, and come out on a level surface close under the Gray Ledge now overhanging at your left hand. This level space, the Dump-top, is a half-circle with its straight side lying at the foot of the cliff. At its center the cliff is cut away to form a huge gateway to the shaft or quarry proper.

Step through this door, still on the same level, and you are in a square, giant chamber, open to the sky, its marble walls upright and marked in four-foot levels where the blocks were channeled out. Once this square shaft plunged deep into the bowels of the mountain, rang and roared with man's machines; now it is filled with deep-green stagnant water to within a yard of the shelf where you stand. It is a place of chill and dampness now, echoing only to the drip of water or the plunge of pebbles from the walls' shelving rim, a good place to leave.

But face about and walk straight to the Dump-top's edge, and you meet one of your life's big moments.

Below you spreads and reaches on either hand one of the world's three most beautiful valleys, a jewel of a valley, an emerald in June, a lovely debauch of every shade of green. There are greens of forest and fields, checked into meadows, grain-fields and pastures, threaded with streams and highways, mirrored in little lakes, the whole shifting and changing color-values under the slow-flying cloud-shadows; while in the far background the dark greens and blues deepen and grow dim on range after range of green mountains, galloping away and away to the hazy melting sky-line.

Standing on the very edge of things while your eyes are filled with beauty, there blows and never ceases, pushes and pours over you, the strong steady wind of great clean spaces. It expands your air-cells and your soul, purges and washes them pure of all that was petty or unclean.

It was a beloved resort of Norma Donelson. She was that sort of girl. Here she came when she was delighted or depressed, and here she had come on this day, bringing her hurt to be healed. She sat on her block at the very front of the rim, where she could keep an eye on Dick picking swamp pinks on the slope above the quarry-shaft's back wall. Here Marshall found her, watching the cloud-shadows in their procession over the valley.

With the persistent rush of the wind in her ears she did not hear his footsteps as he came behind her. Once he saw her drop her face in her hands, while a slow flush spread over white neck and temples. In the short time it took him to cross the level space he had to swallow his heart three times.

"Pardon me—don't be frightened—please!"

At the deep-voiced sound she turned her head without haste, rose with her own easy grace, and stood for a moment before dropping her great questioning eyes, eyes that showed tear-traces, and stood patient before him.

The sad silence, the submission in every lovely line of her, cut him like a lash on the bare heart.

"Ah, don't please look like that. I'm a blundering fool, and I will go away right now. Must I?"

Her head dropped into her hands, and he took a hesitating step.

"Just nod once—and I will go."

No sign, so he went on with a catch in his breath:

"I had to come to make sure there was no mistake—that you understood. Is there a chance that you can ever—" an indrawn breath before he blurted—"care enough to marry me?"

A silence in which she swayed then looked up at him with wide dilated eyes.

"That—was what you——"

She had whispered when a sudden flush swept her, and she dropped on the block to hide her face once more in her hands and moan as she rocked—

"Oh—oh! What can you think of me——"

"Then there is a chance for me?"

Dropping beside her on one knee he caught at her hands with trembling fingers. Suddenly she looked up, and at the light in

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her face he would have swept her into his arms. But she held him off.

"No—not now. I couldn't stand it if you didn't want me after—I have told. I must tell you, if I can."

"Nothing—absolutely nothing can make a difference unless there is another man. Norma—sweet——"

"Don't." Her low murmur was music. "It is not fair to you. Listen. I have to tell you why I thought—why I didn't understand. It was because I had heard almost the same words—from other men—men in the city, who——"

"I know all about that; forget them. It's all past, and now there is just you and I."

"Wait!"

She put out a hand, and he pressed it to his lips.

"Please—I shall give in, if you touch me—and I must have the sense for both. For I have learned, learned bitterly, that there is something that makes men lose their better judgment, lose their better selves and do things they are sorry for. I must be bad, or I should not have that effect on them, but I will not take advantage of you. You must go away, where you can see things clearly for a time. Then, if you still think you want to take on a double burden—for there is Dick to be taken care of and educated, and we shall—should be poor, for a while at least——"

"My own dear——"

He humbly kissed her hand, then raised a face transfigured to tell her—

"My own white princess, we shall have more than we can——"

Their ears were pierced by a high echoing shriek.

"Num-mie — Num-mie — Num-mie! O-o-o-oh—Ah-h-h!"

It came from Dick, up above the quarry-shaft. The girl got the quicker start, and ran back to the entrance with Marshall overtaking her. She called as she ran—

"Coming, coming, Dickyman, coming."

She meantime stifled sobs of horror and Marshall gritted threats between his teeth at the nightmare thing they saw at the top of the quarry's rear wall.

Dick was lying on the very brink, held there by the lunatic, Leach, who was crouched in a hollow behind the boy's body so that only his shoulders and obscene snarling face could be seen from below. He snarled and mouthed at them like a chimpanzee, as he rocked the helpless child on the wall's very edge.

If the maniac ever relaxed his grip on the squirming boy, Dick would drop forty feet, not into the deep water, but upon a four-foot shelf a yard above the pool. Then, a lifeless shattered thing would be swallowed by the sudden depths, for the shelf was strewn and slanted with sharp jagged fragments. It was a death-trap of horrid completeness.

Marshall took in all this at his first glance. The next look showed the rickety ladder on a rubbish-heap at his left. It stood in a niche, concealed from where Leach was, and it was the only way to the top of the wall except a half-mile circuit around the whole ledge. Hardly had he made a step toward the ladder when Leach raised his nasal whining shout:

"Hyar! Out o' that! Call back yer fella, or I drop the kid!"

As he shouted to Marshall and Norma he took one hand from Dick's mouth, pushed him over the brink and caught him by the ankle, swung him once head-down and pulled him back by leg and wrist to his former place on the rocky rim. The boy's yell of terror set Norma to clutching at Marshall to hold him back, while she hoarsely whispered:

"Don't move; he'll kill him. Ah-h-h-h-Dicky, little man—oh Lord save—save him."

"Yah-hah—I got ye!" cackled Leach, showing his discolored teeth. "I'll show ye, ye —— city swells. I'll make ye dance. Want some music?"

Frecing Dick's mouth he wrenched his arm in his great paw, and at the boy's scream Norma became frantic.

"Please—ah, please, don't hurt him. You can have anything—anything you want if you will pull him back and let him go," she begged wildly, with arms outstretched.

"Shet yer yawp!"

Leach clapped hand over Dick's mouth to snarl at the pair below:

"Like —— ye will! I'll do what I —— please, when I —— please, an' so will yew. Yah, ye would, hey? Shoot, ye —— fool an' see what happens."

Marshall had drawn the automatic he wore in his riding-clothes and leveled it at Leach's head. The cunning maniac only

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pushed Dick a bit farther over the brink as he defied the man with the weapon.

"Shoot, why don't ye?" he called. "Shoot, ye —— and see 'im bounce off the rocks down there."

Marshall was helpless, for to hit Leach would be as fatal as to hit the boy, who would fall without Leach's grip on him. Leach grinned and grimaced in triumph. Suddenly he whined viciously.

"Throw yer shootin'-iron in the drink. Throw it now. Throw it!"

Again he wrung a shriek from Dick, and as he repeated his torture the hysterical girl snatched the automatic from Marshall's hand and tossed it into the pool.

"Now let him go—please. We will do anything——"

Leach's yell broke in:

"Yeh—yeh, I got ye now,—— ye! Tear daown buildin's, will ye." Flood of filth. "When I git through with ye, ye'll both be daown there with yer gun, in the bottom of the shaft. I got a gun over behind that tree, an' I'll git ye both, but naow I want t' see ye dance. Here's yer music. S'lute yer partners!"

At the cries he wrung from the boy, Norma sank to the ground and covered her ears. Marshall all this time had never taken his eyes off the crazed brute, and now the Southerner seemed to explode.

"You Leach!" he roared, and the blast of sound stopped the maniac for the moment.

Getting his furtive eye Marshall held it while he raised a slow threatening finger, made him listen by sheer man-power and voice-volume:

"Now, you poor brute. I am coming to you, right now, and nothing can stop me. Lay another hand on that boy—dare to touch him again, and I promise you ten times worse. When I get my hands on your foul carcass you will pray for the hell where you're going, to get away from me. Now I'm coming!"

While Leach was still stunned, Marshall turned and sprang toward the ladder. He was up the rubbish-pile before the lunatic moved.

But the thought of hell seemed to start the deranged mechanism of the maniac's mind. His mean face blanched with terror, then flared wildly—

"I'll fool ye—fool ye both, fool ye and the devil—I'll wash m' hands in innercent blood."

On the instant he had snatched Dick back and was waving over him a long carving-knife he had pulled from his back pocket. Wide eyes glaring, he raised the blade high above his head, chanting at the top of his empty voice—

"Innercent blood, innercent blood."

Marshall, on the ladder, was spared the horror of the sight, and the girl was benumbed, not yet believing her eyes. Another instant and it was over—the knife poised, was descending.

Crack!

The knife flew from Leach's hand, tinkled on a rock and rebounded into the depths of the pool with a soft chuck!

Leach clapped two torn fingers into his mouth, and for a moment stared stupidly, while Dick scrambled to his feet and away.

Out of a clump of bushes at the opposite side of the quarry-entrance, and not twenty feet from Norma, sprang Larry Stiles. He was reloading the little squirrel rifle as he came, and shouting clear-headed orders up at Dick and Marshall.

"Keep back, Dick, back from the edge. Look at your feet and keep in the path. Get him, Marshall. Never mind Leach—get the kid and down the ladder quicker'n lightnin' — hurry — *pronto* — beat it — paw gravel. There, —— it, he's after his Winchester. The ladder—on the run, or he'll git ye both."

Marshall, bounding along the narrow path that topped the side wall, met Dick at the angle and snatched him up. The way back was harder, down grade on smooth rock with rolling pebbles that might shoot him over the brink, he had to pick footing.

Leach had scrambled back to a gnarled yellow birch, where he snatched up his rifle and got behind the tree-trunk, safe from Larry's light bullet. But the fingers hurt by Larry's first shot made his movements clumsy, as he pumped the lever and took aim at Marshall's back.

Larry, kneeling at Norma's side below, cuddled the little rifle to his cheek. While he drew a bead on Leach's gun-muzzle, he talked to Marshall and to himself.

"Faster if ye can—watch out for stones. (If the cuss 'll slip a hand out along the barrel—) Don't look back—I'll keep ye posted—now put down the kid, so he don't get ye both."

Like the real man that he was, Marshall obeyed instantly, set Dick on the path in

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front, and crouched to protect him with his body from the shot that was sure to come. He was whispering encouragement to the boy.

The girl stifled a moan with her hand, but could not look away. Would it never end? Larry was talking under his breath still:

"What's Sim waitin' for—goin' to get him at the ladder, standing still—by Henry, he's one man-size man—that Marshall. Stick your paw out, Sim—le-eetle farther—by Henry I got——"

Crack! Bang! We-ow-oo-o-o-e-e!

The rifles spoke almost together, the flattened bullet howled across the valley, and Marshall never twitched a muscle as he followed Dick down the ladder, untouched. All danger was past.

Leach had exposed a supporting hand just in time for Larry to spoil his aim, and now the lunatic had torn fingers on either hand. He was still staring at them when handcuffs were snapped on both wrists, and he looked up meekly into the face of the man who had taken him twice before.

Down in the quarry-gate Dick was explaining to the anxious grown-ups that he was all right:

"Course I hollered—he stopped hurting when I hollered good an' loud. Now I want to go fishing with Lawwy down the cwick—oh, Num-mie—look. He is sittin' wight on his tummy, and I bet he hasn't winked one little wink."

Dick squatted on the shelf to point out the solemn bull-frog in the quarry pool.

Now that Leach had been led off out of sight by the ex-sheriff and his men above the ledge, there was no other object to engage attention and relieve the embarrassment of the two men. Larry seized the chance to escape from thanks.

"That's true as Gospel, son," he agreed. "I did promise to take you down the crick some evenin' this week, and we got to be movin' if we want to be on hand for the evenin'-feedin'-time. C'm on."

"No you don't!"

Marshall stepped before him and caught his hand warmly.

"You certainly saved us by your sense and clean shooting. We belong to you now, and you can't dodge responsibility for what you possess. What are you going to do with me, for instance?"

"I swan; I don't know!"

Larry flushed slowly, and returned the grip with interest as he met the man-liking in Marshall's handsome face.

"I never had any millionaires on the place, got no place to pasture one. Think you can use this one, Miss Norma? Warranted sound in wind an' limb, and not afraid of anything on this green earth. Make y' a present of him. Come, Dick."

And he dropped his eyes from the happiness he saw in the lovely face. In his own there was for the moment a pale shadow of pain as he led Dick to the top of the steep road under the ledge. There he turned his head to call back cheerfully—

"Drive better in double harness, I guess."

Then he and the boy sank out of sight.

Marshall looked after him with a lump in his throat, and then a low rich voice at his side went through him.

"Bless his big heart. We must be very good to him——"

"We—'we'?" Marshall was breathless. "Then you—Norma, my sweet——"

But his lips were better employed.

"GIT SIM, did ye?" asked Wash as Larry entered the store with Dick.

"Hen got 'im all right. We want some flies, Wash, shoemakers and brown spinners."

"Where's Miss Norma?" Wash asked as he passed out the assortment.

"Up on the Dump, but they don't know it!" said Larry. "These shoemakers are no good; they won't look at 'em if the tail's whipped off."

"Here's s'more—what ye mean don't know it?"

"Wouldn't know it if they was goin' over Niagara Falls on a raft, she and Marshall," said Larry. "These are good enough." Then he turned to Uncle Lem who was looking over his spectacles. "Better 'phone t' the Junction not to put his trunk on the Flier. That trunk won't take a trip 'til it goes on a weddin'-trip, or I'm no weather-prophet."

"Gosh, I'm glad," Wash exulted; then felt he must pull a long face.

"But 'f they both go, this place won't even know it's dead."

"Where do you expect to go when you die, Wash?" asked Uncle Lem.

"He just natchally can't go," Larry decided. "Wash 'd kick 'cause 'twas dull in heaven, hell or Mexico!"

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THE SWORD OF KARA MAHMOUD

by H A Noureddin Addis

"'AND we will surely educate you with fear and hunger, and decrease of wealth, and loss of lives, and scarcity of fruits,'" quoted Osman Bey, Kurdish chief, lineal descendant of Kara Mahmoud, the mighty warrior, and first of his house, as with a despondent gesture he seated himself opposite his wife and looked doubtfully at their scant evening meal.

" 'But bear good tidings unto the patient, who, when some misery befalleth them, say: "Verily we are Allah's and unto Him shall we return." Upon them shall be blessings from the Lord, and mercy; they are the rightly directed.' "

Reverently his wife continued the quotation from the well-known text.

"Thus says the Book, in which there can be no doubt," responded Osman Bey with a shrug. "But listen, wife; this day have the agents of Mirza Yussouf Khan come down upon us and carried off the remainder of our sheep. Of our cattle there remain but two old cows, that even a Persian money-lender disdains to notice.

"Our fine old rugs, for centuries in the family, have been long since bartered away for the reluctant gold of a cheating Armenian trader. Our articles of gold and silver have gone piece by piece, until there is left to us nothing of value except the old sword—the famous sword of Mahmoud, my mighty ancestor. Shall we sell that too, Selma, beloved?"

Selma Hatoum's face blanched at the suggestion and she shrank back trembling from her husband.

"The sword of Kara Mahmoud! What sayest thou, Osman? Sell that blessed heirloom upon which hang the fortunes of the family? Never! Why, long ago, as a young girl, even before thou hadst come to our tribe seeking me in marriage from my father, I knew its history. All Kurdistan has heard of the sword. To sell it would be to disgrace forever the family of Kara Mahmoud. 'Twould be an Armenian trick—worse—even they have an honor that may not be bartered for gold. Besides," here Selma Hatoum's voice fell, and she looked about her with awe-struck gaze, "there is the prophecy."

"I know," acquiesced Osman Bey, lowering his gaze. "Was I not reared from childhood in this house? And did not the spell of the old dervish sheik, Kyor Ismail, whose hand first girt the Sultan's gift about my ancestor's body, lay dark and gloomy upon my childhood's happiness as lies the shadow of yon oak across our doorway when the sun is low in the west? Prophecy and tradition alike have entered into the very substance of my being so that I, too, bow beneath the thought of the crime which I suggest. It is for you, beloved wife—you and our children—to save you yet a little time from hunger and misery that I would do this."

"Not for me, oh son of Mahmoud! Not for me, nor for my children! For are not they too sons of Kara Mahmoud? And does not the blood of Sikkyeban-zadé, my famous ancestor, flow through their veins? Those two old warriors, what would they say? Listen, Osman, their spirits whisper: 'Death before dishonor!' "

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"You are right, Selma, my soul; and gladly would I lend my voice to those iron-willed spirits. But what of the prophecy? 'Tis but a tradition to me. Oh, I know well it is said that when the sword shall be removed from beneath this roof for other purpose than to accompany the ruling chief to battle, then falls the house of Kara Mahmoud. But do I know this? Have not our fortunes fallen despite the relic? And does not that as certainly foretell our race's doom?"

"Fortunes fall and fortunes rise, my husband," returned Selma Hatoum with a wan smile. "Who knows, perhaps the sword of Kara Mahmoud may yet rebuild our fortunes. But what in reality says the prophecy? I have heard that Kyor Ismail left with the sword a beautiful poem, in which is contained the family prediction."

"He did indeed leave such a poem, but I can not read it. It is written in Persian."

"But I know the Persian speech, for was not my mother a Persian? But, alas, I have not the art of reading and writing."

"Vallah! We may yet understand the prophecy," cried Osman Bey, springing hastily to his feet and running to an ancient chest which stood in a corner of the room. "Can not I, who am educated in the Turkish schools, read the Persian characters? Except that the writing of the Persians is more elegant, more graceful, and that they make use of rounded curves and flowing lines in place of the simple angles and quick, blunt endings of the Turks, one writing is just like the other. If you can understand the meanings of the words as I pronounce them we will know for ourselves the sense of the prophecy."

As he finished speaking Osman Bey withdrew from the chest a large sheet of parchment, and brought it to his wife. The sheet was yellow and wrinkled with age, but the writing, although faded, stood out strongly against the page. The hand-writing was large and bold; the characters fashioned with mathematical precision in elegant Persian style.

Slowly the chief read the unfamiliar words, his wife frequently asking him to repeat a word over and over with different vocalization, different accent, or stress, until she would grasp the sense and pronounce it correctly after him. Again and again they read the poem in their laborious manner until finally the meaning of the whole was firmly fixed in Selma Hatoum's mind. Then she explained it to her husband:

As beckons life to life, so calls the blade
The conquering Sultan's gift to Black Mahmoud,
When hanging still beneath his roof-tree's shade
Uncertain Fortune frowns, irresolute.

As flies the bird, the fortunes of the race
Are wafted still upon the wings of Fate.
Thy hilt, oh sword, doth yet the truth embrace
Whereby this house again shall be made great!

Forget not, victor's son, this relic steel
Contains within the fortunes of the clan.
Let not an alien touch its word reveal,
Nor stranger hand its graven hilt e'er span!

"Then the sword must not be sold," was Osman Bey's thoughtful comment.

"It must not be sold," echoed his wife. "Come—months have passed since last I crossed the threshold of the room which guards the relic. Let us look again at the sword. Mayhap the sight of it will strengthen our hearts, inspire us with something of the courage of old Mahmoud."

"But the sword," gasped Osman Bey, when as they stood at the door of the room the parted curtains revealed the naked wall where the ancient weapon was wont to hang, "the sword is gone!"

"Oh Kara Mahmoud-zadè, "wailed the awestricken woman, as she slipped to her knees, her face pale as ashes, "may the mercy of Allah be upon you! It is gone—gone—and with it the glories of the race of Kara Mahmoud!"

WHEN, after the first shock of surprise had passed, their minds slowly regained the normal, the question as to how this strange disappearance had come about occupied the place uppermost in their thoughts.

Some few months earlier Hassan Bey, a youthful cousin of Osman, had gone to Constantinople to seek his fortune. Hassan was very poor, having subsisted for many years upon the bounty of his cousin, never lifting a finger in his own behalf until Osman's increasing poverty finally rendered it imperative that he do so.

Many among the old wise men had shaken their heads gravely over the prospects of a young man's beginning a perilous journey to the capital blessed with neither friends nor money. But Hassan Bey set out

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bravely upon his travels in spite of their warnings, the roseate future conjured up by his youthful optimism being the lodestar which drew him with unwavering constancy toward the city of his dreams.

"Have you been in this room since Hassan was here?" asked Osman with a hint of suspicion in his tone.

"I have not," replied Selma Hatoum with a noticeable start.

Her husband seemed to have read her innermost thoughts.

"He wouldn't have taken it, would he?"

"Why not?"

"That may explain his gaiety and happiness the day he went away," added Osman Bey after a long pause.

"Just as I was thinking. He no doubt expected the sword to bring him luck."

"But the prophecy doesn't say that. It only deals with the sword in connection with the actual chief."

"Does Hassan know the prophecy? Of course not. He probably had heard something about it and imagined that it meant good fortune to any one who might chance to have the sword in his possession."

A long silence ensued, during which the brows of both husband and wife were knitted and gloomy.

"Then I must go to Constantinople," remarked Osman Bey, quietly.

"It is God's will, my husband. You must go."

"And what will become of you and the children while I am gone? To travel without money requires much time. At best it will be many months, perhaps a year, before I can return."

"We are in God's hands," ejaculated Selma Hatoum piously.

"Then you fear nothing?"

"Nothing."

"I will talk to our people before going. As long as they have bread you will not starve."

"Our position will be more enviable here than yours, traveling among strangers without money."

II

A FEW days later Kara Mahmoud-oghlou Osman Bey, Kurdish chief and man of considerable importance among his own people, sat beside the caravan road where it skirts the base of Ak Dagh, and waited. Here, outside the mountain fastnesses of his tribal haunts, he soon learned that he was plain Osman, the Kurd, a man to whom neither Armenian merchant nor Turkish peasant would bow. An individual, moreover, whom popular suspicion seemed strangely to connect with the disappearance of Suleyman Abd-ul-Qader, the rich Arab merchant who had last been seen in those very mountains some few weeks earlier—and who, it had been rumored, would be restored to his anxious family only upon receipt of a large sum in good Turkish liras.

Also he had noted as he traveled through the thickly-populated, well-cultivated valleys a certain tendency on the part of the merchants to try to conceal their more valuable wares, especially those that were readily portable, as well as among the farmers with whom he held conversation, a peculiar reticence when the talk veered around to the subject of livestock.

It boded ill, Osman Bey thought, for his penniless journey that in the very beginning he should experience these petty annoyances. When last he had been out from his ancestral home it had been as a wealthy Kurdish chief of illustrious lineage, a man to be treated with deference, whatever one might think of Kurds in general, or of Osman Bey in particular.

"We have indeed fallen upon evil times," he soliloquized, munching a piece of dry bread, the offering of a shepherd of his own race whom he had passed with his flocks the preceding day, "when the scion of the warrior Mahmoud may be publicly insulted by sleek, round-paunched Armenian traders, and when in his miserable poverty he dare not resent their conduct."

Osman Bey had not long to wait. A distant cloud of dust held his attention from the first. Soon he made out the little glinting reflections from the trappings of a caravan, and a little later he was able to count eighteen mules, rounding a spur of the mountain some distance away. Then as they approached he heard the voices of the travelers as they talked, calling from one mule to another.

"See, Ibrahim, the *hamut* (pack-saddle) of the third mule begins to slip. Let us stop a moment and readjust the pack, or we shall have old Hadji Daud's precious bales of Ispahan silks strewn in the dust," called a voice from the rear of the caravan.

"Whoa! Whoa! Wilt thou never stop,

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long-eared son of Eblis?" cried Ibrahim, the *caterdji*—mule-driver—whom Osman rightly judged both from his appearance and from the language in which he addressed the lead mule to be a desert Arab. "Thou offspring of a she-dog, sired by a jackal," he continued, beating the animal across the nose with the end of his lead rope.

The great mule stopped in his tracks, and turning his head, gave the Arab the cunning, malevolent look of the vicious mule. The *caterdji* returned his glance with a grin; they were the best of friends, these two. And few there were aside from Ibrahim that could handle the brute.

"Come, Armenian! Come, dog!" continued Ibrahim, glancing back over the line of weary animals that had come to a standstill behind their leader, "thou art ever ready with thy jackass voice, but as usual when work is to be done thy tardy hand is witheld."

The Armenian came forward, a large, swarthy man, ragged and dirty, of about Osman's age, which is to say neither young nor yet middle-aged. He grinned heavily at his younger Arab companion, and after a few minutes of good-natured cursing in which each did full justice to the family, tribe, and nationality of the other, a shout from a fat, bearded man seated upon one of the mules, set them working like madmen at the disorganized pack-saddle.

They were great friends, Ibrahim the Arab and Hagop the Armenian, and the illuminating depths of their combined objurgatory powers furnished a constant element of surprise and amusement to the travelers and traders that made up the caravan. In one respect alone Ibrahim had the advantage; he could include the Armenian's religion in his curses, whereas, since the remainder of the caravan was Moslem, Hagop wisely refrained from touching upon that of the Arab.

Of course he knew that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, it would be received as a joke and bring forth fresh volleys of laughter. But it was that hundredth case that he feared. The case wherein some bilious, or otherwise unappreciative, listener might provoke an avenging assault upon his person, and Hagop could mentally picture the bruised and crestfallen Armenian that would emerge from the attack.

In the meantime Osman approached one of the caravan passengers who was sufficiently isolated that their conversation would not reach the ears of the others.

"Peace be with you, brother, and the mercy of God," he saluted, at the same time noting with appreciative eyes the fashionably cut European costume of the other.

"And with you be peace," replied the young man in soft musical tones which Osman recognized as being so similar to the accent which Anatolian comedians ascribe to European Turks, that he rightly judged himself to be addressing an individual of that stock.

"I am on my way to Stamboul, my friend," confided Osman. "I must go, but I have neither friends nor money. What is the destination of this caravan?"

"Trebizond."

"There are other destinations that might be better for me, but if God will, I shall go to Trebizond. Think you, friend, that I might travel with this caravan, working as *caterdji*, or something?"

"I doubt it, brother. The owner is a Persian. He sits yonder—the fat, black-bearded man. But; Allah! He is a slave-driver, a malicious, grasping slave-driver! See, with this whole caravan he has but two *caterdjis*. And they work from morning to night—aye, and usually far into the night. They are the true beasts of burden here, not the mules."

"I will speak to the Persian," returned Osman, moving slowly in the direction of the great man.

"What," cried the proprietor, replying to Osman's prayer for work, "another dog of a Kurd? But two days since, another of thy thieving race asked me the same question. By the splendor of God! Are the flocks of the Armenian farmers exhausted, or has the fact at last penetrated the thick heads of the rich Arab merchants that they should keep away from your mountains with their wares?

"Of a surety these sources of wealth which God has so mercifully provided for the Kurdish nation must have suddenly dried up, that two Kurds should be in search of employment. Go back, Kurd! Back to the fat ewes of the Armenian, and the heavy, goatskin purse of the Arab! Go home and be thankful for what the All-Merciful has already given you! A speedy punishment, and one not well suited to Kurdish tastes, will be the reward of thieves who attach themselves to the caravan of Seyyid Ali Khan."

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III

THE evening was already well advanced when the caravan arrived at the *Han* where they were to pass the night. And it was some hours later when the two *caterdjis*, Ibrahim and Hagop, their evening tasks completed, sat down for a final cigaret before going to sleep. As they sat there smoking and exchanging confidences upon the vileness of the Turkish race—the only question upon which they were wholly in accord—a shadow fell across the circle about which they were sitting, lighted by the young moon, and both looked up startled at the sight of the stern features and ragged garments of Osman Bey.

They offered him of their tobacco, but Osman refused. They pressed him to eat of their bread, but in spite of his hunger he put it aside. Then, since they could not press their hospitality upon Osman Bey, they tried to entertain him with their tales, tales of the caravan, of their many strange and amusing experiences with unusual passengers, of their adventures with thieves and robbers, how they had circumvented plausible tricksters and hoodwinked avaricious but overcredulous countrymen along the caravan trails.

The Kurd listened and said nothing. He heard their mirth-provoking tales with the same stolid fixedness of countenance as those which in the telling brought the ready tears to the eyes of his sentimental hosts. Suddenly he rose to his feet. He was about to do something that must give him great pain, for Osman Bey was an honorable man—honorable and kind-hearted. But now he found himself in the toils of that necessity which knows no law.

Osman's onslaught was both sudden and unexpected. Insults and curses poured from his lips, the like of which had never even in their most inventive moments occurred to the *caterdjis*. First he began with the Armenian, cursing his race and religion as well as the souls of his ancestors, casting aspersions upon the chastity of his female relatives and the bravery of the males. But Hagop only laughed. He was willing to be amused, but would not be insulted.

Then Osman turned to the Arab, and for a time the Arab laughed too. But gradually, as the Kurd began to inject a note of earnestness, a ring of sincerity, into his voice, Ibrahim's anger rose until at last with the growl of a wild animal he leaped for Osman's throat. The watchful Kurd saw the attack coming, and stepping aside allowed the Arab's fierce onslaught to carry him some distance beyond the point where he stood—then before Ibrahim could recover himself, Osman ran out of the circle of light, through the open door of the *Han* with the Arab at his heels.

Hagop walked heavily to the door and looked out, but in the half-light he could neither see nor hear the combatants. Then he sat down to smoke while awaiting their return, but at the end of the third cigaret sleep overcame him.

IV

"WHAT, fool! What—hast thou done battle with a tiger during the night? By the footprint marked in blood—thou art a sorry spectacle! Come, tell who closed thy eye! And thy right arm—canst thou not raise it?"

Thus did Seyyid Ali Khan greet his Arab *caterdji* when the latter limped painfully into the *Han* the following morning.

"I fought last night, sir. I did battle with a madman, a lion in courage and a giant in stature. Vallah, I fought with all the strength there was in me, but he was too large, too fierce. And now I would go from here into the upper valley where dwells an Armenian farmer of my acquaintance. There I would rest and recover my health against your return from Trebizond."

"I can ill spare thee, Ibrahim," returned the Persian, a suggestion of kindness in his tone, "but in thy present plight thou wouldst be of little service. So go, and fail not to meet us here on our return. But remember, thy wage ends with last night."

"What, will that Armenian dog never be ready to start?" growled Seyyid Ali Khan, painfully bending his fat body to tie a rope about one of the packs. "By the sun and its noonday brightness, these Armenians are slow! Two hours—two precious hours have we lost through his bungling!"

As the Persian spoke a quick step behind him caused him to turn. There stood Osman Bey.

"So thou didst follow the caravan, Kurdish swine! And after I had commanded thee not to do so. But it would appear that there is the working of the Compassionate in this thing. Wouldst thou still

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work for me, Kurd? And wilt thou serve me for thy passage to Trebizond?"

Osman assented, taking his place at the Armenian's side. He found the Persian's service much as Suleyman Zia Bey, the young Turk, had told him it would be, slavery of the worst sort. But even a Kurdish chief, powerful though he be in his own country, can not be particular in the choice of his employment when he is without money in the midst of strangers—especially when that employment is in the direct line of his goal.

V

ON THEIR arrival at Trebizond, Seyyid Ali Khan, yielding to the earnest insistence of Suleyman Bey, gave Osman a few pieces of silver as payment for his labor. This he did very much against his will, since the Kurd had virtually agreed to work gratis in return for his passage, but Suleyman said it was right that he should be paid, and referred to many influential friends and relatives in Government positions whose opinions, he felt sure, would coincide with his own.

Whether these people existed or not Osman never knew. But even though they might have been purely creatures of Suleyman's imagination, conjured up for the occasion, they served their purpose none the less. And, as it transpired, the Persian's few small pieces of silver proved important in determining the traveler's future.

Lying in the harbor at Trebizond there was a small sailing vessel, scheduled to sail for the capital the morning of the day following the caravan's arrival. To the captain of this vessel Suleyman Bey, who had constituted himself the Kurd's protector and adviser, directed Osman. At the gangplank he met the captain, Edhem Effendi, a gruff old Albanian who had sailed the Black Sea for so many years that his wrinkled, weather-beaten old face was well known in every port.

"No use talking to old Edhem Re'iss," replied a ragged lounger on the wharf to whom Osman confided his troubles before going on board the *Kara Marti*, "he's seen too much of the world for you to reach his heart with a tale of that kind."

The loafer was right. Osman's importunities failed signally in his interview with the old "Deniz Kurdu," who refused absolutely to take him on board except at full passenger rates. He had better success, however, with one of the sailors from the *Kara Marti*—a chance acquaintance of the sea-front, to whom he offered all his meager earnings as *caterdji* in case the sailor would smuggle him on board the vessel, concealing him until they were at sea.

Next morning the *Kara Marti* had been under way for several hours when the *porsun*—boatswain—Mehmed Effendi, going between decks, found Osman Bey huddled between two bales of Khorassan rugs.

"Here," he cried, leading the abashed Kurdish chief before his captain, "see what I found in the *anbar*! A rascally Kurd!"

"What—thou!" exclaimed the *Re'iss*," in the loud, overbearing tone which he habitually used for the purpose of impressing his inferiors. "Did I not tell thee yesterday that I would have no lazy, thieving loafers aboard this ship. Throw him overboard, Mehmed Effendi!"

"But, *Effendim*, perhaps the dog is unable to swim."

"Suppose he can not. What then?" retorted the captain indifferently.

"I should dislike to take upon myself the responsibility of drowning even a Kurdish robber."

"Well, make him work then. Let him go with us to Constantinople since he wishes it, but see that he pays for his passage, and doubly in work."

"Very good, *Effendim*," replied Mehmed Effendi. "Come, Kurd."

Osman followed the boatswain, toward whom, in spite of his insulting manner, he had a kindly feeling, since he inwardly thanked Mehmed for having saved him from a watery death. The officer gave him a pail of water and a large hand-brush with the order to scrub the deck.

"When the water is gone," said Mehmed Effendi, "you know how and where to fill your pail. When the brush is worn out come to me, I will furnish another."

Thus during the weary days of their voyage from Trebizond to the Golden Horn, Osman Bey's first and only concern was to polish the deck. It was his pursuit and his pastime, his duty and his diversion.

It was just about the hour of the Zuhr prayer one day, and the midday sun beat down most cruelly upon his unprotected back and neck as he bent over his work, that Osman cautiously raised his head and looked

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discreetly about him. No one was in sight; it was his opportunity to steal a moment from his labor in which to stretch his aching back. These intermissions came all too seldom. Every single vertebra of his back ached with a separate and distinct ache, which were in no wise to be confounded with the individual pains emanating from the cartilaginous pads marking the interstices between the vertebræ.

Indeed, had Osman Bey understood anatomy, and thus given thought to the true inwardness of his sensations, he might even have doubted the continued existence of those cartilages, since the feeling was more that of the unyielding bones themselves rubbing and grating against one another than anything else.

"What a vile position for a chief of the house of Kara Mahmoud," groaned Osman Bey, as with hands pressed to hips he endeavored to stretch his benumbed back. "It would have been better to stay in Kurdistan and starve than to be driven and cursed by a brute of an Albanian!"

Osman spat venomously across the nearby rail into the sea.

"But the sword," he continued musingly. "I must recover the sword. Selfishness shall not interfere with my mission. It is to the race, the clan, the house of Kara Mahmoud that I must answer for its safekeeping. It is my duty to posterity. I am the sword's guardian. I hold it in trust from former generations for coming generations. It belongs, not to me, but to them —the old house of Kara Mahmoud and the new. I stand between the two—the agent of both—responsible to both. I can not, dare not, turn back."

"Thou, *balderi chiplak* (hobo), I'll teach thee to make *keyf* on board my ship. I'll teach thee to sit on my deck and dream of sweet throat-cuttings in thy native Kurdistan. By the perfumes of Paradise, I'll give thee something to dream about!"

And the captain's thick-soled shoe came in violent contact with Osman Bey's anatomy with such vigor that the Kurd's fez flew from his head like a stone from a catapult and straight across the rail to the water.

But the fez never reached the water, for with a sudden downward swoop, one of the sea-gulls, which was following the vessel, seized the cap in its beak and bore it away toward the east, in the direction from which they had come.

The thing was so sudden—so unexpected —that the captain forgot his mission and stood staring open-mouthed at the fast diminishing bird. Osman also stared, and as he did so a peculiar feeling came over him. He recalled the Persian verse—

"As flies the bird——"

"The prophecy," he exulted mentally. "It is the fulfilment of the prophecy." And it was with a feeling of distinct elation that he returned to his distasteful duties.

VI

WHEN the ship docked at Serai Bournou, Osman Bey, eluding the watchful eye of old Edhem Re'iss, slipped quietly ashore. It was the captain's intention to impress the Kurd into helping discharge the ship's cargo, but when he looked for Osman he was not to be found.

Upon quitting the ship the Kurd stood in the midst of wonders such as he had often dreamed of, but never before seen. He wandered about down by the Galata Bridge and Yeni Djami, up the hill to the Seraskeriat, around by the At Meidan and Aya Sophia. Everything he saw interested and impressed him. The city seemed enchanted —marvelous. His cousin, Hassan Bey, had given him by way of address, a certain café bearing the name of one Mehmed Asim.

At first he had dropped into each café as he passed to ask whether or not that was the café of Mehmed Asim, but as he wandered farther and farther the sheer immensity of the city began to impress itself upon his mind, and he saw the futility of searching for his cousin in that way.

As evening approached Osman slowly made his way back down toward Yeni Djami and the bridge. He was weary with sightseeing and his feet, unaccustomed to cobblestones, ached from the contact.

In passing the fountain near Yeni Djami it seemed that in the vast sea of passing faces he caught a glimpse of one that he recognized.

"*Mash'allah!*" he exclaimed aloud in his excitement, "could that have been Suleyman Zia Bey?"

But as he turned the corner of the fountain the face, lost in the throng, was nowhere to be seen.

It was with a feeling akin to despair that Osman finally abandoned the search for the

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evening, seeking shelter and repose for the night in a small mosque close by the shores of the Golden Horn.

"If only I could find Suleyman Zia Bey!" he kept repeating to himself.

But he was doubtful on this score. He might easily have been mistaken in the crowd passing Yeni Djami, and beyond that he did not know to a certainty that the young man had come to Constantinople. And even though he had, to set out to find him was an undertaking scarcely less difficult than to find Hassan, himself—or the mysterious café of Mehmed Asim.

Next morning Osman felt more hopeful. He had passed the most comfortable night since leaving his home in Kurdistan, and after the morning prayer a young *softa* had shared his breakfast with him.

"Suleyman Zia Bey," the *softa* repeated in response to Osman's inevitable query. "If it's the Suleyman Zia Bey that I know you will find him if he is in Constantinople at the Ministry of the Interior."

With the young man's directions for finding the Government office fresh in his mind, Osman's hopes ran higher upon setting forth than when the preceding evening he had sought the little mosque's protecting shelter. He had no difficulty in finding Suleyman Bey, who, after a cordial welcome, accompanied him in his search, by judicious inquiries locating the café that he sought without loss of time.

As they made their way to the café, which was situated in one of the little, narrow streets just off Sheikh-zadé Bashi, Suleyman Bey explained to his mystified guest the secret of his earlier arrival in the capital. It appeared that he had waited in Trebizond until the day following Osman's departure by sailing vessel, then taken a Mahsousseh steamer which brought him to his destination in less than half the sailing time of the *Kara Marti*.

Since then he had kept up a more or less thorough watch for the Kurd's arrival, and it was on his way back to the office from an inspection of the newly arrived sailing vessels that Osman had caught sight of him the day before near Yeni Djami. On this last visit of the previous day he had learned from old Edhem Re'iss of Osman's arrival, also of his disappearance without waiting to assist in the discharge of the cargo. He had for this reason given up all idea of being of assistance to the Kurd, since to find him in that maelstrom of humanity was almost out of the question.

Hassan Bey, they learned, was well known to the proprietor of the coffee-house, who told them that he would no doubt call very soon, and very cordially invited them to wait there for his return. Mehmed Asim proved to be a pleasing host, kind and hospitable, as well as an entertaining talker. And as Osman listened, captivated by one of the old man's tales of his native Bokhara a hand fell upon his shoulder, and he turned to face his cousin.

"Osman," cried Hassan eagerly, extending his hand, "my dear cousin, may peace and God's mercy be with you."

Osman was affected by his cousin's wholehearted greeting, but he remembered his mission and witheld his hand. With lowered eyes, and in a voice vibrant with emotion, he stammered—

"The sword, Hassan—the sword of Kara Mahmoud."

"What of the sword, my soul?"

"Gone!"

"The sword gone! Is that why you came?"

"Yes. It is the prophecy. It must not leave the house unless I bear it. What have you done with it, Hassan?"

"Forgive me, Osman. I forgot to tell you. When Mirza Yussouf Khan came to our house on the day before I came away, in my fear lest his greedy eyes fall upon the priceless relic, I put it into a hollow in the wall of the house. It is a small opening between the boards about breast high, near where the sword hung against the wall. You will find it there now."

"No. You are mistaken, Hassan. It can not be. The sword has been taken away. Nothing remains to us now. Our flocks are gone—seized by the merciless hand of Mirza Yussouf. And the prophecy of Kyor Ismail says that the sword carried with it the fortunes of our race."

"Listen, Osman," exclaimed Hassan, his face lighting up under the stimulus of a sudden idea, "as I lowered the sword into its place the hilt twisted in my hand so that my finger came in contact with a secret spring. A pocket in the hilt opened, and there dropped out of it into my hand a little piece of parchment covered with strange markings. At the time I thought little of it. Except for the fact that I feared the Persian might enter the room

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and see the valuable old relic, I would have taken the sword out and replaced the piece of parchment. As it happened, I put it into my *torba*—then forgot it."

"Here is the parchment," continued Hassan, removing a large leathern wallet from his pocket and searching a moment in its voluminous depths.

Then he looked up blankly, a puzzled expression on his face.

"I thought it was here," he went on, beginning again to turn the papers over and over with feverish haste.

"You may have left it in your room," suggested Suleyman Bey.

"Possibly," replied Hassan, "but I think not. I really had never given it a thought from the time I first saw it until Osman's question reminded me of the business of hiding the sword, and all that. I may not have put it in my *torba* after all."

"Perhaps you dropped it on the floor at home," suggested Osman Bey, "in the unused room where the sword hung. If you did, it is very likely still there. No one ever enters the room, and it could not be disturbed. I have found where the sword is, even though it does not seem possible that it can be true. So I suppose I may say that my journey has been successful."

"Successful if not profitable," commented Suleyman Bey with a smile.

"Yes," returned Osman sadly, "for generation upon generation the sword of Kara Mahmoud has guarded the fortunes of his descendants. Now, perhaps, the prophecy has run its course—the beneficent power which old Mahmoud's weapon wielded for his children has passed away. Such things must happen. I bow my head in submission to Allah's will."

With an awkward, self-conscious salutation, and a murmured promise to call at the café after office hours the same evening, Suleyman took his leave of the cousins. He looked back from the door and saw Hassan still searching through his papers, while Osman stood transfixed, as one suddenly stricken by the heavy hand of Fate.

VII

"WHEN the *Kara Marti* sails tomorrow afternoon I go with her," announced Osman Bey without looking up when late that evening Suleyman slipped into a seat at the former's side in the little café. There was an air of sadness, almost of despair about the Kurdish chief as he sat there watching the graceful —if somewhat heavy—evolutions of the Albanian laborers in the center of the café engaged in one of their national dances.

"What—will you not make a longer stop in the city? The sights of Stamboul can have pleased you but indifferently if you are to be content with no more than a three days' visit," exclaimed Suleyman.

"No," replied Osman slowly, "it isn't that. The city is so beautiful, wonderful. But I must think of other things, my family, my people. Besides I have the opportunity now since I know old Edhem Re'iss of the *Kara Marti*. Such an advantage must not be overlooked by one who is forced to travel without money."

It was well for the two Kurds and their young Turkish friend that all was bright and gay about them, for in their hearts there was no gaiety. Suleyman Bey's sympathetic nature was genuinely touched by the position of the unfortunate Kurdish chief, for whom he was beginning to feel a warm friendship. Osman Bey himself mused upon the prospect of a repetition of that unhappy journey; this time a part of it in the Winter, while Hassan Bey joined in his cousin's gloomy forebodings for the future of their ancient and respected family.

At an early hour their party broke up, Suleyman bidding Osman Bey a friendly farewell in which he expressed a confidence in the future which he dare not feel, and Osman reciprocated with a genuine regret at parting from the young man to whose friendly interest he felt that he owed the success of his journey.

SHORTLY before noon the following day Suleyman Zia Bey sat idly at his desk thinking of Osman's unfortunate plight, when the door suddenly burst open and Hassan entered.

"Here," he exclaimed breathlessly, thrusting a scrap of parchment, yellow and wrinkled, into Suleyman's hand, "this is it. It had escaped into the lining of my *caftan*."

"I suppose these strange markings have no meaning," he continued, still panting from his run through the streets, as he ranged himself behind Suleyman Bey so that he could look over the latter's shoulder while he examined the paper.

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"Why, this is written in the ancient Uighur characters; the writing used by the Turks before they adopted the alphabet of the Arabs," cried Suleyman excitedly.

"Then it can be read?" queried Hassan eagerly.

"Certainly it can be read," replied Suleyman Bey, laughing. "Old Hodja Mahmoud Khorassani, one of the professors of the Turkish language and literature at the college where I studied until last year, is but little short of mad on the subject of Uighur. He says the Turkish would have been a leading language of the world today, and would have had a much better literature if we had continued to use that alphabet instead of trying to ape the Arabs."

"And where is this learned Hodja Mahmoud Khorassani?" queried Hassan, almost beside himself with anticipation.

"At the college, I suppose."

"Can we not take it to him—will he not read it for us?"

"Undoubtedly. I can go with you this afternoon, and will introduce you if you like. But this introduction is unnecessary. Once he knows of the existence of the parchment it will be more difficult to prevent him from reading it than to persuade him to do so."

"But Osman's ship sails early this afternoon, and this may contain some message, some information that might be useful to him. Can we not go now?"

Suleyman Bey closed the book on the desk before him.

"Come—in that case we must hurry," he said.

Upon entering the class-room they found the old professor in the midst of a lecture dealing with the influence of Persian literature upon early Turkish poetry. As this was one of his favorite themes, Suleyman, not wishing to interrupt, motioned Hassan to follow him into an obscure corner, there to await until the first flood of the professor's eloquence should have spent itself. But old Hodja Mahmoud, recognizing his late pupil, interjected a word of apology to the class, then came forward with outstretched hand, his kindly old face wrinkled into a smile of benign amiability.

"This, my dear Professor, is Hassan Bey, cousin of Kara Mahmoud-oghlou Osman Bey, an important Kurdish chief," Suleyman hastened to present his companion as soon as his own greetings were over. "Hassan Bey has something here that he wishes you to read for him."

The professor bowed ceremoniously.

"I am glad," he began, but he got no further.

The Uighur characters on the parchment in Hassan's hand caught his eye, and with the swift infallibility of the eagle as he swoops and bears off his prey in triumph, Hodja Mahmoud seized the parchment and, adjusting his spectacles with one hand, held it firmly before his eyes with the other.

"Marvelous!" exclaimed the old man, fairly dancing with excitement. "Here is where we get our *sagher-noun*, the only characteristically Turkish feature now remaining in our written language. And here——"

"Can you read it, Excellency?" queried Hassan excitedly.

"Can I read it!" echoed the professor. "As well as a I can modern Turkish. What beautiful, what exquisitely formed characters! The man who wrote this was a wonder for his time."

"What does it say?" persisted Hassan, breathlessly.

"It says—it says. But look! See that word—it's *chichek*. *Chichek*, just as in modern Turkish. Also *meyshe*."

"But what does it say about the *chichek* (flower)?"

The great drops of perspiration which had been gathering on Hassan's forehead began to roll down his face.

"It says—it says. What does it say? Ah, I see now. It says that they will open. That is, I suppose they will. It says, 'At the time when the flowers open'—and that quite naturally presupposes their opening, does it not? And here is something exceedingly valuable from a philological standpoint. A word which is no longer found in Ottoman Turkish, although in everyday use in the Kirghiz dialect. One more link in the chain of evidence——"

Here Suleyman Bey touched the professor's arm. With his eye on Hassan, he could easily see that the Kurd was already in the first stages of nervous prostration, while the professor was rapidly becoming maudlin through joy in his discovery. Left to himself it was impossible to say when the *Hodja* would return to normal.

"Just translate it into modern Turkish for us, Professor, please," he requested.

"Surely," replied the old man, stroking

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his grizzled beard, "surely. Here it is:

"At the foot of the great oak whose shadow as the sun sinks in the west falls across the doorway, when the first cherry blossoms open. Three *arshins* toward the peak of Ak Dagh direct, two *arshins* deep. The treasure-store of Kara Mahmoud."

"Come!" cried Suleyman, snatching the parchment from the professor's hand, and disappearing through the door, followed closely by Hassan.

The instant that his callers disappeared down the broad stone steps at the entrance to the building old Hodja Mahmoud, his spectacles well toward the tip of his nose, appeared at the class-room door.

"What manners!" he gasped under his breath, as looking down the stairway he caught a fleeting glimpse of the backs of his late visitors.

There was something benignly bovine in the expression of the old professor when he cocked his head forward to peer over his spectacles, a fact that constituted one of the perennial school jokes. And as they observed him looking after his unceremonious callers the class wit gave a fair imitation of the snort of a playful cow.

The titter which ran around the room following this stroke of humor called the professor to earth again, and he returned to his desk muttering:

"At the Kurd I am not surprised. But Suleyman Zia Bey always seemed a well-mannered young man. One can never tell."

Then he resumed his lecture.

VIII

OLD EDHEM RE'ISS was shouting orders to a sailor just in the act of casting off the last cable which held the *Kara Marti* to the shore as Suleyman and Hassan arrived alongside.

"*Allah ashkinê dour* (for God's sake hold)!" cried Suleyman Bey. "We want Kara Mahmoud-oghlou Osman Bey. Is he on board?"

"He is not," replied Edhem. "Cast her off, Mehmed!"

"You say Osman Bey, the Kurd, is not on board?" queried Suleyman.

"Oh, the Kurd. Sure, there's a Kurdish hobo on board, but he said his name was Osman. The rest of it is new to me. I'll bring him on deck and you can have a look at him. If you're police, I'll warrant he's the man you're looking for."

"You don't need to travel like a beggar now," insisted Suleyman Bey, after they had told Osman of the finding of the parchment, and its reassuring message. "Come, wait a few days, and I will find a man who on the strength of that message together with our jointly pledged word will advance you sufficient money that you may go back to Kurdistan, if not in a style befitting your new-found wealth, at least in comfort."

"Yes, cousin," added Hassan. "Suleyman Bey, indeed, speaks truly. Besides, you have passed but three days in the capital, and that after your long journey. It is ridiculous to go without seeing something of the beauties of Stamboul. Why, even after the months that I have been here there remains much for me to see."

Osman Bey shook his head negatively.

"I thank you, friend, and you too, cousin. A long, hard journey lies before me. A hard journey, whether the traveler has money or not. Already the gray of Winter looms in the sky—and—and I must be in Kurdistan when the cherry trees put forth their blossoms."

"Well, young men," barked old Edhem Re'iss, hurrying toward their little group, "if you want this rascal Kurd, take him, if not, kindly take yourselves to the wharf over there. I want to be on my way."

The leave-taking was hurried, and a few minutes later, as Osman stood, his eyes riveted upon the little black spot which still marked the location of his friends, the captain's gruff voice startled him from his reverie.

"Well, donkey's companion, get thy pail and brush. Don't stand and stare all day!"

LATER that afternoon Osman began to feel the old ache in his neck, and his back seemed as though it never would straighten out again, but strangely enough, the pains failed to quench his effervescent spirits, while the words of Kyor Ismail's prophecy ran continually through his mind.

Thy hilt, O sword, doth yet the truth embrace
Whereby this house again shall be made great.

"And Allah hearkened unto him who praised Him," repeated Osman Bey, bowing his head in the direction of Mecca. "We praise thee, oh Allah."

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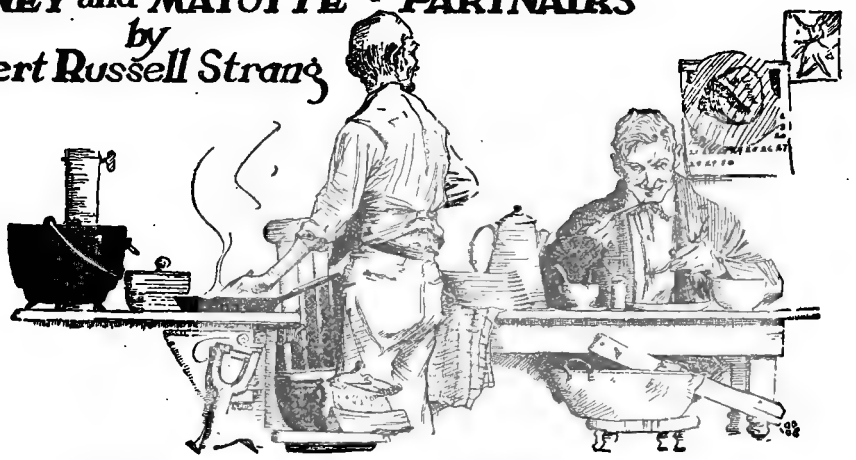
MALONEY and MATOTTE · PARTNAIRS

by Robert Russell Strang



Author of "Off the Trail," "Christmas Eve on Sulphur Flats," etc.

Shtep on yer fut,
Shtep on yer fut,
Shtep on yer fut, Malo-ney!

MEN who inherit the solitudes, be they of the ocean, the desert, the prairie or the woods, unconsciously evolve a cameo from their experience that epitomizes their conclusions. The above is "Para" Maloney's. He hummed it as other men smoke, chew, drink or in any other manner endeavor to keep the tenor of their lives around par.

He murmured it now as he sat on the end of the little wharf at Iditerod City, Alaska, at five o'clock on a May morning, his eyes vacantly fixed on the shallow roily river that swished past beneath his feet. And the reason he was up so early was because he had pressed his cotton pillow for thirty hours—a habit of his when opportunity offered—or since he and his side-kicker, "Paradise" Matotte, had struck town the night before but one.

The hearty laugh of the latter even now floated to his ears from the direction of the Arctic saloon a dozen rods away. He had not yet found time to waste upon sleep—save an occasional forty winks in a chair; but despite that fact, only a few minutes ago he had finished a hoedown that had lasted ten minutes.

Two days before Para and Paradise had sold out their claim on Flat Creek for one hundred thousand dollars, and at ten o'clock this morning they were to meet the agent of the dredge trust, who were the purchasers, to receive their check. Thereafter it was their intention to take the first boat for the Outside, where neither had been for a dozen years—though both were still well on the right side of forty.

Para was hungry. He looked at his watch, then behind him at the stove-pipe of the Last Chance restaurant. A faint curl of smoke rose as straight as a waterspout, cleaving in twain the high spruce hill behind the camp.

"Thank Hiven," he growled, rising and making tracks for the kitchen door.

A few moments later he cautiously opened the latter and peered inside. A man, famine-gaunt was punching down a basin of bread dough to the ditty—

"A Chinaman without a queue has got to stay away."

"Well, if it isn't 'Hungry Mike'," cried Para, advancing inside, and relieved that the cook was one that he knew. "Troth, me lad, I havn't seen yez for a cintury."

"Hello, Para," the kitchen skeleton replied, extending a prehensile set of digits. "Nome, in 1903, wasn't it?"

"About that," Para answered absently, his round blue eyes on a basin of eggs and a platter of slashed bacon. "Mike, me bo," he whispered, indicating the late universal breakfast food, "will yez just fry me about a dozen of thim, bacon in proportion, crisp, an' some fried checkako spuds?"

"Sure I will, Para," Mike replied in his deep sepulchral voice.

"An' a few buckwheats, Mike, me boy,"

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supplemented Para, his eye encountering the hotcake pail.

"It's a go, Para. Just let me get at the woodpile."

Para waved him back.

"You nurse thim eggs along, Mike. I'll catch the wood."

And by the time his breakfast was ready the woodbox beside the stove was piled almost to the ceiling.

"The dinin'-room table ain't set yet, Para, but just sit up to the bread-board."

He placed thereon a huge platter containing Para's breakfast. The latter drew up a stool and went to work.

Exactly twenty-five minutes later he motioned to Mike to stop frying buckwheats, valiantly finished those just put on his plate and struggled to his feet.

"Faith, that was the finest breakfast I ever ate, Mike," he breathed heavily. "An' what's the damage, me son?"

"Seven-fifty, Para."

The latter threw a ten-dollar gold-piece on the bread-board.

"An' the change will be yours, Mike. An' thank ye."

Mike chuckled and his bones rattled. A vision of a skeleton on a spree crossed Para's mind.

"Whin is the first boat due, Mike?"

"The *Minnie* ought to be in tonight or tomorrow morning, though there's no way yet of telling ahead. Goin' down the river?"

"Outside for good, Mike, me boy." And he related his and his partner's good fortune.

"I've seen a lot of you fellows that have struck it goin' Outside vowin' never to return," observed Mike dryly, "an' I've lived to give a lot of them a hand out. Alaskans are easy pickin's for those sharps on the Coast. I wish you luck, just the same."

Para laughed good-naturedly.

"Well," he made answer, "if they get anything away from me for nothing they'll be wilcome to ut."

With which he returned to his contemplations on the wharf humming his triolet.

By and by the camp woke up. Shortly before seven o'clock a man stepped up and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Want to go to work?" he growled.

Para was instantly upon his feet.

"Shure, sor, shure," he replied. "I was just wonderin' what I'd be doin'——"

"Come along with me and I'll show you what to do," the other broke in, leading the way toward the end of the dock warehouse where he pointed to a pile of tools. "Freeze on to a pick and shovel."

Para picked out the best two in the lot and a few minutes later he was digging a trench for the base sills of a wireless tower. Iditerod was in line to be connected with the Government wireless at Kaltag, and to enjoy fresh-caught news from the outside world.

Shortly after ten o'clock the dredge trust agent and Paradise, his partner, discovered him. They had been hunting for him all over the camp previous to that.

"Hey, you Parah," his partner cried. "Don' you want no monee for dose claim on Flat?"

Para looked up and stopped his song.

"Bedad, if I hadn't forgot all about ut." He looked cautiously around. "I guess I can sneak over. The boss ain't in sight."

He leaped from his trench and started running toward the two-by-four bank.

"Hurry," he called over his shoulder.

Presently all concerned were seated in the bank office, the transfer deeds signed and the agent's pen poised above his checkbook.

"Who will I make this out to?" he inquired.

"Companyee, companyee," cried Paradise. "She is called Malonee an' Matotte. Ain' dat right, Parah?"

"Anything'll do, anything'll do," hastily replied Para. "Only hurry; I've got to get back to me job."

The agent handed the signed check to Para.

"There you are, boys."

Para glanced over it hurriedly, then handed it to Paradise. The latter viewed it from every angle and the corners of his mouth drooped.

"Papeer," he scoffed contemptuously. "Everyt'ing papeer."

His face suddenly brightened and he slapped the poke of dust in his hip pocket.

"Dis is the stuff," he cried.

Para handed the check to the bank manager with the request that he wanted it sent to San Francisco. A few minutes later he was handed a draft for the amount which, with other valuables he stowed away in an old tobacco sack. Then after a look up and down the "street" to make

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sure that the boss wasn't in sight, he hurried back to his work. Paradise retired to the Arctic saloon.

A FEW minutes before twelve o'clock the latter left the kitchen entrance of the Last Chance restaurant wheeling a barrow from beneath whose muslin covering issued an appetizing odor. His course toward the place where Para was working was like a forked streak of lightning, and momentarily it looked as if the dogs who were following him would fall heirs to the feast. He finally and without accident drew up beside Para and seated himself on a handle of the barrow until the boss of the job made it noon. Para thereupon sprang from his hole and raised the muslin.

"Chicken be me sowl," he cried. "Troth an' you're the little gintleman, Paradee."

"We have wan pickneek, Parah."

"Picnic is right, me son."

Para seized the handles of the barrow and started for the dock. There in the shade facing the river he came to a stop, lifted out the tray and flung himself down beside it. Paradise followed suit.

Para picked up one of the large black bottles whose tops and necks were wrapped in pink tinfoil and looked at the label.

"Sham-pag-ne," he read aloud. "What's that?" Never had a drop of intoxicating liquor stung Para's throat. "Exthra Dry." Para unwound the wire. "Troth an' if it's anny drier than I im it must have been brewed in a blast furnace."

The cork popped and went half-way across the river. Para raised the bottle to his lips and disposed of about a third of it.

"They forgot to put the salt in ut," he cried, drawing in his lips.

"What, you no lak dat soda water?" inquired Paradise, chuckling.

He had many times vowed to get Para under the influence of hootch, but hitherto had always been outwitted.

"'Twill do in a pinch, me son," replied Para, attacking the roast chicken. "But ginger ale is me favorite."

"How mooch dey pay you a day for dat work, Parah?" inquired the little Canuck when the edge had been taken off their appetites.

"Tin dollars—an' tis worth it thim warrum days."

"But why you work at all? Hain't we got dose fifty t'ousand dollar?"

"Why do I work?" echoed Para, throwing the empty bottle into the river. "An' what would loife be without it? Think of the punishmint ov bein' compelled to do nothing for the rist of yer days?"

"Me, ah t'ink dat would be de nice job. Give me de monee an' ah be busee all de tam," Paradise scoffed.

"You'll savvy wan day, Paradee. Once I knew a blacksmith who made the natest horseshoes in all County Cork, an' he was the proud man. Wan day a big horse tramped on his right hand and made bubble an' squeak out of ut, an' iver afterward he couldn't hould a hammer in ut.

"Now, this blacksmith had made money so there was no need for him to worry, but he wint down to the shop ivery day, an' for an hour at a time would try to get his right hand to hould a hammer. But always it fell out of ut. So wan day he wint home to his bed, an' a month later he died ov a broken heart, so he did, an' lyin' flat in his hand they found his ould anvil hammer. Yis, sor; if yez want to kape the wather of a spring good, kape takin' wather out of ut. If yez want loife to kape swate in the mouth—work."

He uncorked the second bottle and raised it to his mouth.

Tears were rolling down the cheeks of Paradise.

"Dat pauvre blacksmit," he gulped. "I give heem mah own right han' to mak dose horseboots."

At that moment two old men came out of the deserted dock warehouse yawning and rubbing their eyes. One of them was a slender agile old fellow with a humorous twist to his mouth; his companion looked like a fat man fallen upon lean ways, and both wore beards of the scrubbing-brush variety. Spying Para the former leaped two feet in the air and emitted a long wolf-howl.

"Para Maloney," he cried. "Saved!"

"Cap Dillon and Bill Dinning!" cried Para, springing to his feet and shaking hands with them.

The lean fat man who sported the name of Cap gestured dramatically toward the sun and struck a pose.

"As me friend Richard the Third remarked on a memorable occasion," he mouthed:

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Now is the Winter of our discontent
Made glorious by this son of Pat Maloney.

Para's face was wreathed in a smile of welcome.

"Now, where did yez come from?"

Bill was about to make reply but he was silenced by a gesture from his friend Cap. The former thereupon turned his attention to the wine.

"We have just this moment issued from our boudoir," began Cap, "and the reason we are getting up so late is because we stayed awake till dawn to wash our faces in the crystal dew—an old rite, sir."

"Troth, an' it must have been of the distilled variety," retorted Para, "an' taken inwardly," he concluded, glancing at their dirty faces.

With a good-natured grin upon his intelligent face Cap took the bottle from Bill, and with a nod to Para and Paradise, he too shot the sun. While in this act Para tried to remember how often he had grubstaked the two old prospectors and concluded that in the last ten years they had cost him about one thousand dollars. In every camp he had ever been in himself he had met them.

Cap laid down the empty bottle with a sigh of regret and murmured something about wine and want.

"You havn't answered me question yit," Para reminded him.

"In this as in every other camp, Para," Cap resumed, "where gentlemen shy of funds are unknown, we have received the aqueous hospitality of this one. But I at least—" he favored Bill, who was eating ravenously, with a Laraesque frown—"have not yet broken my fast within its precincts. We can not beg, you know, without jeopardizing even our fluids.

"For two weeks previous to honoring this city with our presence, on a gulch distant thirty miles from here, within whose gravels repose hidden millions, every foot of which we own, we existed for the space of half a moon on saltless caribou. But——"

"Now, bedad," interposed Para, "an' that's too bad."

"She's a bad wan dat caribou without salt," declared Paradise. "Me, ah know." He seized hold of the wheelbarrow. "Ah get you somet'ing to eat." And he set out for the restaurant.

"Your friend, Para," observed Cap, "with peculiar timeliness upholds the name of the beautiful country he is named after."

Para wasn't listening.

"Two years since I saw you last, isn't it?" he asked.

"The same," Cap made reply, smacking his lips over a mouthful of dry bread. "On that occasion you grubstaked Bill and I to go into the Salchaket country. We went, we prospected, but our luck remained at zero.

"LAST Fall we arrived here as roustabouts on the *Dusty Diamond*. She got frozen in, so we put our salaries into beans and flour and hit the everlasting hills. We have excellent prospects, Para, but—body-fuel we must have. This Winter we have consumed so many rabbits that for a while I feared that Bill would walk all-four for the remainder of his days. A few months hence, Para, compared with us, and you, J. D. Rocklemann will feel like an object for charity."

"An' that's a fact, Para," Bill supplemented. "It's a long bench of low-grade gravel; but with water—wow! We'd have been takin' out pay now if we'd had grub. Accordin' to my figures they's about five million dollars in it. Give us three months' grub, four or five hundred feet of twelve-inch flume hose an' within a week we'll start puttin' that hill over the riffles. 'T's a fact, Para. I expect to have eggs for breakfast every morning after this Fall. Millions in it. Millions!" Bill concluded, rolling his eyes.

Para was hugging himself with joy. It had always been thus with his old friends. They scorned to breathe in figures less than a million. In days past he had sat for hours listening to them spin their dreams. And when he grubstaked them he always considered that he had been recompensed in advance.

"Me friend an' I are goin' Outside on the first boat," he presently remarked. "We've made a little stake over on Flat."

"Now I'm glad to hear that—about the stake, I mean," cried Cap. "If you remember me to write it I'll give you a letter to take out with you. It's one I've been going to write for many years."

"I'll remind yez," Para promised him.

At that moment Paradise returned with a second barrowful of food—even to the wine. Para slipped each of the old men a

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ten-dollar gold-piece and prepared to return to his work.

"I'll see you tonight about the grubstake," he called over his shoulder.

After finishing their meal Paradise took the old men up town with him, paid a restaurant and bar bill of one hundred and ten dollars for the "pickneek," and rejoined Cap and Bill in the Arctic bar.

Upon seeking his friends after supper that night Para discovered Bill Dinning and Paradise doing a hoedown opposite each other in the barroom, the former ringing in stunts that would have done credit to a vaudevillian acrobat, the latter marking time by chanting an old French chanson. Posed on a poker table and surrounded by a joyous crowd of miners, Cap Dillon, his hair, air and parka artistically awry, his face distorted with exaggerated gloom, was declaiming thus:

"——who would fardels bear
To grunt and sweat under a weary life——"

"Come down out ov that," cried Para, rocking his pedestal. "If 'tis bears you're afther seein' already it'll be siven-headed monkeys wid hin's toes befure marnin'."

Muttering something about "conscience making cowards of us all," Cap stepped down and permitted Para to lead him, Bill and Paradise up to the company-store. There he purchased for the old men's account two hundred and fifty dollars' worth of food, canvas hose for carrying water and a few tools. Paradise insisted upon paying for half of the grubstake, and Cap that each of them accept a bill of sale for quarter interest in the "Much Ado About Nothing" group of claims on Shakespeare Gulch.

On shoving his away in his pocket Para expressed the hope that the venture would be more fortunate than "The Merry Wives of Windsor," the name of their last group he had grubstaked them to prospect. But in reality he expected nothing. He had always taken their bill of sale because it took the curse off charity.

Next Para made arrangements with a packer to take their outfit out to Shakespeare on the morrow, paid the cost in advance, and with the object of keeping his friends out of the barroom for the remainder of the evening, he asked them up to his muslin-walled room.

There Para reminded Cap Dillon about his letter, and the latter being in the right mood he called for pen, ink and paper. None of these essentials being handy, Para forthwith made a trip to the store for them, and on his return discovered that Paradise and Bill had disappeared, and Cap seemed to be thinking deeply.

"Para," began the latter presently, his fingers covered with ink, "the years are growin' on me—can't shak 'm off. Ver—very well. Twen'y-five years 'go my daughter cloped with —— scoundrel—mother dead, y'know—havn't seen 'er since. Know she had two children—wan' to leave' em my millions. Writin' to my sister now t' fin' out. You pos' m' letter in Frisco; she'll get it. Gettin' old, Para, y'see, 'Love comes back to its native dwelling,' " he quoted.

"Go right to it, Cap," replied Para. "Tell thim I'll maybe pay thim a visit."

Cap started to muddle the ink with his thoughts, and Para went to bed.

About midnight the *Minnie* arrived from Anvik, and it was given out that she would start again for the Yukon port at eight in the morning. Paradise, Bill Dinning and Cap Dillon, none of whom, it was all too evident, had been to bed, woke Para at six o'clock and told him the news.

Para rose and dressed and began to pack his new suit-case. While he was thus employed Cap Dillon pulled his letter from his pocket and handed it to him. Para placed it in the envelope of his grip and promised Cap that he would post it in San Francisco, and that if he found time he would visit Cap's daughter, Mrs. Franklin, whose address was on the letter.

After breakfast Para marched Cap and Bill up to the packer's, determined to see them upon the way before he himself left town. The skinner was throwing the diamond hitch on the fourth and last mule when they arrived. While talking with the skinner Cap and Bill disappeared. It took Para a half-hour to find them. They begged for one more day in town, but Para was obdurate. He knew their tricks. To circumvent any further attempt to escape he tied each of them to a twenty-foot rope, the other end being attached to a mule.

"Farewell, farewell, me bark awaits," cried Cap dismally, striking a pose.

But at that moment his bark stopped waiting and he only saved himself from a

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severe fall by going on all fours for a few yards, when he again struggled to the perpendicular. Para and Paradise then went down to the dock and boarded the steamboat.

THROUGH two-hundred miles of mosquito-infested flat the *Minnie* crawled, squirmed and sometimes flew on her way to the Innoko, down which she churned as far as Shageluk slough, through which she passed to the Yukon, thence to Anvik.

At the first opportunity Paradise sneaked into the company-store and placed ten ounces of gold dust on deposit, receiving a receipt therefor. It had not yet sunk into the consciousness of the little French-Canadian that he could now get along without, squirrel-like, laying away a hoard for the Winter. He had lived so long on the edge of things, however, both in Quebec and in the North, that he was as much a creature of instinct as intelligence.

The *Susie* came along two days later, the partners went aboard and she swung down the river at a twelve-knot clip. At Andreafski, where she went in to take on oil sufficient for the remainder of her trip, Paradise drew the attention of Para to a red and brown-faced Eskimo girl in a short walrus-skin parka and mukluks.

"Dat's mah style," he whispered, winking broadly at her.

Para grinned at the lonely figure against the desolate tundra background.

"Bedad, if she hasn't got a face like a pumpkin and eyes loike a Chinaman."

"He mak de gran' wife jes' the same. He catch de salmon, de fox an' de rabette an' mak da fine bouillabaise. Ma, ah know."

Shortly after leaving Andreafski they entered the flats, the river broke up into hundreds of channels, and e'er they reached the Bering Sea the Yukon hills were altogether lost sight of. Four days out from Anvik they rounded Egg Island into St. Michael. The latter is also a small treeless island, an Eskimo reservation, a United States of America fort and the port of trans-shipment from the ocean to the stern-wheeled steamers.

At this point Paradise deposited twelve ounces of dust at the company store and flirted with the Eskimo maidens until the arrival of the *Umatilla* four days later, on which they embarked for San Francisco, where they arrived ten days later and registered at a hotel favored by well-to-do Alaskans.

Their first act was to cash their gold-dust, of which each had about fifteen hundred dollars' worth, at the mint. Then they purchased complete outfits of clothing and attended to their bank draft. That business concluded, Paradise sought out a savings-bank and deposited therein one hundred and fifty dollars and promptly forgot all about it. Not having yet seen a cent of his fifty thousand dollars in actual money, Paradise wasn't taking any chances.

A week later, when they had seen the chief points of interest in the city, they were seated in the hotel lobby one morning watching the ceaseless flood of pedestrians passing by in the street when a young-old gentleman in a frock coat, high hat and nose glasses seated himself next to Para. The latter sized him up as a gentleman of leisure, but was disappointed when a few minutes later the object of his guess engaged him in conversation.

In a well-bred voice he speculated at length and learnedly upon the varied aims of the crowd units and wound up by comparing them with little children who, after a day's toil of play, lay their little golden heads upon their pillows, into which all their troubles melted to become the joy-drops of pleasant dreams.

"And men are but little children," he said in conclusion, "for our toil, like their castles, comes to nothing. Indeed, we are a great deal worse than they are and have not the same excuse, for we continue to lay plans for the accumulation of wealth at an age when we should be meditating upon the hereafter, counting our virtues instead of our vanities. But why do I declaim against the pernicious habit when I myself am one of the worst offenders?"

Para didn't know, but the eloquence of the man thrilled him.

"It's the truth ye say, sor," he made reply. "For over a dozen years me an' me partner have been minin' and prospectin' in Alaska, an' now since we've got enough to last us for the rist of our lives, we're lookin' for a way to make more."

"My dear sir—" the speaker laid a white hand on Para's arm to emphasize his sincerity—"look at me and be warned in time. I, too, was once like you, but the

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love of gold for display and aggrandizement got the better of me. Today my many interests hound me like a criminal! But what can I do? They are my own creations; in a way, you might say, my children.

"But, oh, the continuous worry! For years I have thought of a home in the country and a peaceful garden wherein to meditate. But, here I am like many thousand others, battering away at the old windmill. Ah, I see a friend waiting for me."

He rose, handed Para his card, bowed courteously and took his departure.

Para glanced at the card. It was inscribed Anthony Bowen.

Para had many conversations with the man after that, Paradise never for a moment departing from the rôle of listener. On the second Sunday morning they were in town he invited them to take an auto ride with him, and lunched them at a roadhouse a score of miles from the city. On the way back he told the chauffeur to stop at a huge new factory about which a great deal of new machinery was lying.

"That," he said to them, "is a venture I and some friends are heavily interested in. It is a plant for the manufacture of ammunition. We have large contracts not only for our own Government, but also for the Russians." With a sigh he commanded the chaffeur to drive on. "It behooves us to be patriotic, you know. Money, money," he murmured abstractedly. "I am getting old, Mr. Maloney, and business affairs weigh heavy upon me. If I but knew of a bright young man—" he muttered more to himself than to Para.

Para drew in his breath sharply.

"Why can't I be that young man?" he asked himself.

To their surprise on returning to the hotel he gave them an invitation to dinner in the hotel café and introduced them to two beautiful girls.

"My daughters," he said proudly.

During the repast Paradise was so ill at ease that he could not keep a morsel of food on his knife despite the fact that for the most part his eyes were on his plate. Para kept his head, however, and afterward he could have sworn that the girls were as ill at ease as his partner. They seemed indeed to be very demure, modest maidens of twenty and twenty-two respectively.

After the cigars their new friend invited them up to his suite, where Miss Laura, the elder, sang and played, and in the course of the evening even Para was induced to bellow "The Low-backed Car."

"Ain't they the foine people though, me son," cried Para on regaining their own rooms.

"He is one sport," replied Paradise. "Dey are w'at you call de *bon ton*. Dat Miss Olive she hit me hard in de inside. Ah lak her to cook mah beans for all de tam." And Paradise put his chin in his hand and sighed profoundly.

"It's just as well for ye, Paradee, that ye chose the young wan. Miss Laura for me. Did yez notice the blue eyes ov her?"

And for a while the mind of each was filled with visions and dreams of the future, the latter but a nimbus for a girl's face.

"We've got to be thinkin' ov gettin' our money invisted," mused Para, breaking the silence.

"Ah, leave all dat to you, Parah. You have de beeg head."

Next morning Anthony approached them with an apologetic smile.

"Would you be so kind," he inquired, "as to motor with my daughters this afternoon? Poor dears, they are very lonely. I am very busy, you know. My car will be at your disposal."

"Certainly, sor, certainly," replied Para, his heart in his mouth.

"Thank you very much. My daughters, like yourselves, are strangers in the city, but I shall instruct my chauffeur to drive you out to the Cliff House, and telephone my daughters to be down at eleven o'clock."

He bowed and turned with a frown on his face to greet a man with an open blueprint in his hand, who evidently was seeking instructions.

"Just think of the poor man bein' hounded to death with business," whispered Para to his side-kicker. "No wonder he's sick of the sight of money."

THE motor drive that day was the forerunner of many that took place in the days that followed; and the more our friends saw of Laura and Olive Bowen, the better they liked them. There were also theater and card parties, at which there were never more than five persons; walks through the city and visits to the big stores of Market and

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Kearney Streets, where our friends insisted upon buying them expensive and frequently unusual gifts, as when Paradise insisted upon buying a hat that momentarily caught the fancy of Olive, and paying fifty dollars for it.

During those days they only saw Anthony Bowen in the evenings; and there was a two-day period when they did not see him at all, which Laura explained to Para by remarking that he had gone to Portland on business.

While hunting in his suit-case for a stud one morning Para came across Cap Dillon's letter. With kindly feelings for his old friends he put it in his coat pocket, resolving to post it on his way to breakfast.

"I wonder what they're doin' now," he mused.

"Paradee," he remarked, turning to his partner, "I'm goin' to ask Mr. Bowen to advise us about invistin' our money. Maybe he'll let us in on something good an' give us a job besides. Then there's the gurls, you know."

He grinned.

"Dat is wan good idea, Parah; we den be all wan —— familee. H'it can't come too queek for me. Ah han' you mah monee any tam you h'ask for her. Ah lak to pay dat Mees Olive's board till hell she is froze undair an' ovair. She got my—what you call—butter."

"Goat, goat, me son," replied Para. "Well, I'd sooner thim have strings on our Billy's than anny I know of."

Para hung around the lobby until Anthony Bowen came down, and buttonholed him on the way to his car. Smiling pleasantly, the latter asked Para what he could do for him.

Without any circumlocution Para stated that he and his partner wanted to invest one hundred thousand dollars, his advice thereupon and a job.

Anthony Bowen raised his eyebrows and was instantly serious.

"You honor me," he replied. "I am an extremely busy man, Mr. Maloney, but, having been so kind to my little girls I can not refuse you. Could you come around to my office in an hour?"

He handed Para a card upon which was printed his business address.

Para replied that he would, and the other went out to his car.

At the appointed time Para and Paradise appeared at the office of Anthony Bo[wen] and were ushered into a small but lu[xu]ously-furnished room and that gentlem[an] presence, at which the man whom had seen with the blue-prints rose and his departure.

Mr. Bowen asked them to be seated came directly to the point.

"I am interested in but one large pany in San Francisco," he began, though my activities extend all ove[r] West. The company I refer to is Western Ammunition Corporation, factory I showed you. The stock held privately, and the men at the of it are possessed of unusual bus acumen. The dividends, I may rem will be enormous.

"As I just already remarked, there is stock for sale to the general public, but can let you gentlemen have one thousa[nd] of my shares at par, one hundred dolla[rs] each."

"An' could we get a job there too, sor?" inquired Para.

"The president of the company is out of town just at present, Mr. Maloney, but on his return I shall arrange for excellent positions for both of you. Owning one thousand shares of stock you can command a position, you know."

"Thank ye koindly, sor. We'll take that stock, won't we, Paradee?"

"Ah leave dat to you, Parah. You have de beeg red head."

"Thin we'll take it, Mr. Bowen."

"Very well, gentlemen. Business calls me to Portland this afternoon at three-thirty. Come down here again at two o'clock and I shall have the certificates ready for you, then we can go down to your bank."

Para nodded acquiescence, then flushed.

"There's another thing, sor," he stammered, then paused.

"Pray go on, my dear sir," pleasantly urged the capitalist. "I still have a few minutes I can spare you."

"It's your daughters, sor——"

Anthony Bowen jumped from his chair.

"What about them?" he cried in an alarmed voice.

"Just that me an' me partner here are in love wid thim," replied Para, "but before spakin' to thim we judged it better to have a talk wid you."

For a moment Para thought Anthony

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Bowen was going to strike him, for his face purpled, his eyes snapped and his teeth actually gnashed. Para never in all his life beheld such a sudden transformation. He was almost afraid of him. Presently, however, he was the suave man of the world again.

"Pray forgive me," he murmured, trembling with emotion. "Let me think it over for a day or two. You see, I never dreamed of such an eventuality when I introduced you to them. They are all I have in the world, you know. Do they—ah—reciprocate your affections?"

"I wouldn't swear to Miss Laura," Para made answer, "but I don't think she is altogether indifferent. Paradise can speak for himself."

"Olive she lak me, ah know," stated Paradise.

Anthony Bowen mused deeply for a few moments.

"Let it go for a few days, gentlemen," he finally advised. "And I want each of you to give me his word that until I mention the subject again neither of you will make no effort to see or speak with them. On my part, at the end of say, three days, I shall give you my answer."

Our friends readily promised, and the subject was dropped. But from the manner in which he clasped their hands and smiled when they took their departure a few minutes later, the love-lorn Alaskans judged that everything was over but the "Wilt thou's" and the "I do's."

After a picture-show and some lunch they returned to the office of the father of their beloveds. He greeted them with dignified reserve and handed each a beautifully engraved certificate about the size of a door-mat which on the face of it stated that each was the owner of five hundred shares of the Western Ammunition Corporation. Then he placed them in envelopes and handed one to each of them with a bow.

"And now we will go down to your bank," he suggested in a business-like tone. And the three of them went down to a waiting car.

IN THE presence of the teller Para and Paradise each signed a check for fifty thousand dollars in favor of Anthony Bowen. These the latter endorsed and deposited, the teller merely visualizing a real-estate transaction. Then the new owner of the money cashed a check of his own, frowningly placed the bills in his pocketbook and rejoined the shorn lambs.

"Now, I have some business to transact before starting for Portland, but I would like you gentlemen to go as far as Oakland with me, and if you will meet me at the ferry in an hour why——"

Our friends promised and they parted.

At the appointed time they were waiting at the ferry for the financial ogre who presently drove up in his car and joined them.

On arriving in Oakland he hired a taxi for them and gave the chauffeur twenty dollars to show them the city. Then he bade them good-by and started for the railroad depot.

Our friends kept their promise and did not try to communicate with Laura and Olive Bowen, though it must be admitted they kept an eye on the ladies' entrance a large part of the following day, but went unrewarded for their pains.

"I guess they're afther feelin' shy," Para excused them.

"Ah feel sore here," replied Paradise, jabbing his solar plexus with his forefinger.

They were just as unsuccessful on the second day, and that night they watched the main entrance, hoping for a glimpse of Anthony Bowen and a word of encouragement. But him they did not see either, so at midnight, still unsuspecting and more than ever in love, they retired to their rooms.

Next morning about nine o'clock the clerk handed Para the following pink-enveloped note:

MY DEAR PARA:

Late last night we received a telegram that father had met with an accident on the railroad. We left for Portland on the Owl train. Please come there to the Fairmount Hotel.

Lovingly,
LAURA.

This he showed to Paradise, who advised him to hurry and catch the first train north, also remarking that he would stay behind. So Para caught the first ferry to Oakland where, after two hours of anxious waiting for a train, he started for the rose city.

When Para arrived at the Fairmount Hotel in Portland late that night he was

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handed a second note that informed him that the girls and their father had returned to San Francisco. As he could not get a train for the latter city until morning, Para, very much relieved, decided he would go to bed.

Alas, Para had gone short of sleep during the last few days. It was one o'clock in the morning when he laid his red head on the pillow and it was four o'clock in the afternoon when the hotel help finally routed him out.

"Bad scran to ut," he cried, much perturbed in mind. "Shure they'll all think I'm lost or kilt."

He caught the six o'clock train back to San Francisco and arrived there early on the following morning.

Hastening up to the room of his partner—which connected with his own—he woke him up and asked for the latest news. But Paradise shook his head.

"Ah no have seen any of dem, Parah," he informed him.

Whereupon Para returned to the office and inquired of the night clerk if the Bowens were in the hotel that night. The clerk looked over his room case and finally informed Para that the Bowens had left the hotel four days before. Para leaned heavily on the desk.

"Do yez know where they wint to?" he asked.

"No, I don't," he replied, turning over the leaves of the register.

He wheeled it around for Para's inspection.

"They were registered 'city,' you see."

Para groaned, and returned to his room and imparted the news to his partner.

"Ah stake mah heart dose girls are all right," the latter declared.

"Same here," chimed Para. "But we also staked everything on the honesty of their father. What do you think about him?"

Paradise shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah don' know," he made answer. "You see, he say a great many words ah no can onderstan'; but he look all right."

"Well, anyway, we can't do nothing till marnin', an' maybe by that time everything will be all right."

And leaving a call to be waked at seven, Para went to bed.

The clerk had nothing new to report to them when they got down to the office next morning, and he asked Para if anything was wrong.

Para related to him his and his partner's dealings with Anthony Bowen, and the latter advised him to go to his office as soon as he judged it would be open, and that if he didn't find him there, to report the case to the police. He added that Anthony had never stayed in the house before.

Para and Paradise were on hand when the office was opened, and a clerk informed them that the man they sought only rented office space from them. But that several days ago he had given it up. No, he didn't know where he had gone. He had given up his desk several days ago.

Before reporting to the police Para thought he would pay a visit to the factory of the Western Ammunition Corporation, so he and Paradise boarded a car and an hour later reached the factory that Anthony Bowen had informed them he was deeply interested in.

At the office of the mill contractor he asked who owned the works, and what they intended to manufacture, and was informed that the factory was owned by a big lumber company who were going into the box-making business. Para waited to hear no more.

Now thoroughly aroused our friends returned to the city and sought out the central police station. The captain listened patiently to their story, then asked to see the certificates Anthony Bowen had given them.

"Why," he replied, after a glance at Para's, "this outfit started up with a great flourish almost three years ago on the strength of a big Russian contract; but something went wrong and it went smash." He pulled out a paper from underneath his desk and turned to the financial page. "The price of the shares yesterday was forty-eight cents. Now give me a good description of every one in connection with it."

Para complied with a good description of Anthony Bowen and the blue-print man, but said not a word about the girls.

"He's a new one to us," the captain replied. "We'll do what we can. You Alaskans are certainly trusting folks."

Para and Paradise returned to their hotel, paid their bills and went to a smaller and a cheaper one. Their funds were

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getting low, in fact, Para was virtually broke.

A WEEK passed by. Para haunted the central police station, but not a trace of Anthony Bowen or his accomplices was discovered during that time. So they moved again, this time to a cheap lodging-house.

It was here that Para discovered Cap Dillon's letter when he was putting away his good clothes preparatory to donning an old suit to go out after a job. Angry at himself for his negligence he sat down and wrote a note of apology, adding that it would now be impossible for him to call, for in the near future he expected to return to Alaska.

"As soon as I get the price," he muttered.

After posting both letters he went down to the docks and got a job longshoring.

One night a week later, on returning to his lodgings, he found Paradise seated upon his strapped suit-case. In his hands were two tickets to St. Michael.

"We tak' dat *Umatilla* tonight, Parah," he stated in a tone not to be denied. "Me, ah haf had all de Outside in mah inside dat ah want."

Para was amazed.

"An' where did yez get the money for the tickets, me lad?"

"Ah cache her when ah come out." He smiled. "Dat's why we go back by St. Michael. De quickes' way is by Skagway an' down de riveer, now we haf to go 'cross dat Pacific an' up de riveer."

"I'll just go yez on returnin' to where we belong, Paradee, for if I was to breathe the air of that room of ours we're shlapin' in for another week, it wud drive me to drink, so it wud. An' to think of all the good air that's goin' to waste in Alaska! Yis, I'm wid yez, me son."

After packing up Para paid a last visit to the police station, but there was nothing there for him. So, in a lighter frame of mind than he had experienced since he had parted with his fortune, he hurried back to his lodgings; the two picked up their suit-cases and walked down to the dock and on board the waiting steamer.

It would be hard to explain the feeling that obsessed them as the lights of the city faded below the horizon, for practically the only people they had really become acquainted with had been the Bowens. So it was natural enough that their experiences with the latter colored the recollection of their stay in San Francisco.

When the last light disappeared and the murmuring of the sea appealed to their consciousness, Para sighed, turned and glanced at his partner.

"I owe ye fifty thousand dollars, Paradee," he said.

"Ah don' care a—w'at you call?—for de money. I nevair touch her with mah han's. Everyt'ing papeer. Had ah touch de gold with mah finger—ah—den ah mees her. But papeer—poof!" He shrugged a contemptuous shoulder. "W'at hurt me, Parah, hurt me sore in de inside, was dat girl. She look, speak an' ack like angel. Ah always t'ink her angel."

Para seized one of his hands and shook it in silence.

"We're in the same boat, Paradee," he finally muttered consolingly, "an' I suppose this thing will come between us an' what used to be our greatest joys in the Alaskan hills and creeks. But we'll fight it together, me son, we'll fight it together, an' by an' by the experience will pay a dividend."

And they retired below to their stateroom.

Paradise was almost his old self when, followed by Para, he entered the store in St. Michael and withdrew the twelve ounces of dust he had left there on deposit two months before.

"Dis take us to Anvik," he observed laconically.

"Another hundred dollars I owe you," Para answered. "It looks to me as if I'd be workin' for you for the rist of me loife."

"You forget dat out of your head," protested Paradise gruffly. "We air partnairs."

The month of September is the busiest of the open season on Alaskan rivers. So many hundreds of tons—or thousands as the case may be—of freight have to be delivered at distant interior points to last the community until the following June. Much of it has to be delivered by the middle of the month if at all, owing to the low stage of the water in the side streams caused up by the freezing up of the river sources in the higher altitudes.

Thus it frequently happens where two boats of opposition lines are running on the same river to the same terminal, a race

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ensues, the crews of the boats betting their season's wages on the skill of their respective pilots.

Our travelers arrived at Anvik an hour too late to catch the *Minnie* for Iditerod, and were on their way to get tickets for the *Monarch*, which was loading up for the same point, when they were approached by the engineer of the latter, who asked them if they would ship with him as firemen for the trip. When they replied in the affirmative he went on to tell them there was a race on between the *Monarch* and the *Minnie*, who had been given two hours start to offset a slight difference in engine power, and that the crews of both boats had pooled their Summer's wages and bet against each other.

Paradise went up to the store and withdrew his ten ounces of dust and, although he knew nothing whatever about the steaming merits of either boat, he instantly determined to bet his gold-dust on the result.

"We might as well be broke, Parah," was the way he put it, "as have only ten ounces. Maybe ah mak' twenty ounces."

"Throw it in, throw it in, me son," cried Para, overjoyed that at last he was going to have something to do. So the ten ounces of dust was deposited with the mate, which raised the pool to about twelve thousand dollars.

For half an hour before the *Monarch* pulled out her steam was blowing off. And when the last man trucked aboard the last piece of freight and the ropes were cast off, it was found that the *Minnie* had a start of two hours and a quarter.

Three days passed before the smoke of the latter was picked up at a point half way up the Iditerod River, and though still about three miles in the lead, great was the joy of the *Monarch's* crew thereat. As she slowly overhauled her rival with the flames belching from her smoke-stack, the excitement became intense.

Para and Paradise, each of them stripped to his undershirt, were behind the boilers ramming in wood, reaching down to the grating with their long iron bars to catch more air, sooty, sweating and happy. When, owing to darkness and scanty water, both boats were obliged to tie up for the night, only a mile separated them. They still had forty to go, or about eight hours steaming.

With every inch of space filled with wood, at the first streaks of dawn both boats cast off and the race was resumed. The *Monarch* trembled from bow to stern under forced draft, her boilers roared and she forged ahead.

Four furious hours passed during which time the *Monarch* gained but a quarter of a mile, a little better than the average increase for the trip. At one o'clock in the afternoon when but five miles from their destination, the *Minnie* got hung up on a bar, and, as the *Monarch* ate up the gap between them, the crew surged on deck to jeer at their opponents. With throttle wide open she attempted to drive through another channel—there being no room to pass in the one where the *Minnie* was—there was a grating sound, a *bumpety, bump, bump, bump* and she came to a complete standstill.

Both boats were on a line with but a hundred yards of gravelly bar between them. The *Minnie* was backing off and a few minutes later she had turned around and was attacking the bar with her wheel, the churning of which loosened the gravel and sent it down into deeper water. A few minutes later the *Monarch* was doing likewise.

During the hour that followed the firemen took ten-minute tricks at the boilers, keeping the steam at one hundred and twenty pounds and an inch of water in the glass. The *Minnie* was the first to break her way through, at which her crew appeared on the stern and jeered, howled like wolves and addressed appropriate if lurid remarks to the crew of the *Monarch*. The latter thereupon backed out from the channel in which she was in and turned into that taken by the *Minnie*, but a quarter of a mile behind her.

Ten minutes later the last stick of wood was poked into the boilers of the *Monarch*, whereupon the chief-engineer went up to the bridge and consulted the captain, who told them to take whatever they could find and to take it quick. The engineer returned with a grin to the lower deck—there was no boiler-room. Piled on the port side of this deck was a hundred cases of bacon.

"Go to it, fella's," he cried, himself seizing an ax and parting the wire binding on the case nearest him.

Seeing the *Minnie* walking away with

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their season's wages the firemen and roustabouts needed no second bidding, and case after case was dumped into the fire hole.

Slowly but definitely the *Monarch* responded, once her maw was stuffed with the luscious sow-belly, and when they turned the bend and came within sight of Iditerod City, she was but fifty yards behind her rival and going strong. The bank of the river was lined with shouting, gesticulating citizens. The water in the glass of the *Monarch's* boilers disappeared altogether and the chief-engineer stood by. Para and Paradise, the perspiration pouring from their faces, were relieved and sprang up to the saloon-deck to watch the finish.

FOOT by foot the *Monarch* drew alongside the *Minnie*, their fenders almost touching, their crews shouting, cheering and cursing. The dock was but a hundred yards away. They were neck and neck—and suddenly Para and Paradise found themselves looking into the excited faces of Laura and Olive Bowen, as they leaned over the railing of the *Minnie* and waved to them.

Para passed a hand across his eyes and looked again. Then he started to wave his arms and dance. The *Monarch* drew away, swung into her dock where eager hands seized her lines. Ten seconds later the *Minnie* berthed below her, beaten.

Our friends still in their work clothes were waiting at the end of the *Minnie's* gangplank when Laura and Olive stepped ashore. The words uttered on both sides were commonplace, but their looks were eloquent.

The greetings over, they started through the dock with the intention of going to a hotel when the quartet ran into Cap Dillon and Bill Dinning, but not the couple of ragged prospectors Para had previously known. Both were shaven clean, painfully dressed in checkako clothes and boots, and disgustingly sober.

"Why, what, my friend Para Maloney—and Heaven too," he added, noticing Paradise. "Welcome to our city."

He glanced from the girls to Para, whose mind had temporarily been knocked out of commission by this second surprise.

"And which is Mrs. Maloney?" he concluded.

Para, the wonderment at sight of the girls not yet out of his face, finally found his voice.

"Neither—yit, Cap," he grinned, "this is Miss Laura and that is Miss Olive Bowen." He turned to the girls. "This is Cap Dillon and Bill Dinning, friends of ours."

"I was sure of it," cried Laura, who had been eying Cap closely.

She flung herself into his arms.

"Oh, grandfather!"

Paradise, who had been seated on one of the girl's suit-cases trying to figure out how they had reached Anvik before he and Para, upon witnessing the latest development, took his head between his hands, assuring himself that his mind had broken down.

"Para, me boy," cried Cap, patting him on the shoulder, "the old world has turned over."

"And are you really their grandfather?" gasped Para.

"The same, sir," he bowed to the girls, "and proud of it. There's something else again: this time, Para, we really have struck it, and half of the Shakespeare group belongs to you and," nodding at Paradise, "the native son of the Promised Land."

"I knew something had struck you," Para whispered in the Cap's ear with a grin, "shure your faces must be tinder yit from the scrubbin'."

"Let's all go up to the Golden North," suggested Cap, "and straighten things out."

And thither all save Bill Dinning repaired. He could not allow such a day to pass without celebrating, so he ducked into the Artic Bar and called for wet, cool things in glasses.

"Everybody drink!" he shouted, throwing a fat poke of dust on the bar.

Cap did not stay long in the parlor of the Golden North after the return of Para and Paradise from the *Monarch*, dressed, in their right minds and two hundred and fifty dollars to the good—their share of the pool—which with the original ten ounces made them feel respectable.

There was a strained silence for about a minute, each gazing oddly at the other, and all excepting Paradise—who would have been content to let things go as they looked—wondering where to begin. It was Laura who finally broke the ice.

"Father is dead," she announced in a low voice.

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Para and Paradise both started, but neither made comment.

"He met with an accident near Ogden on his way East where he was suddenly called on business. He sent us home to Stockton an hour or two before he left. I was at his bedside when the end came a week afterward, and he gave me sight drafts for one hundred thousand dollars which, between you, he said, you had given him to invest.

"On my return from Ogden I wrote to your hotel advising you of what had taken place, but I received no reply. On that same day I received grandfather's letter and your own—we have lived with our grandaunt, Mrs. Franklin, since mother's death, you know—and for a day or two I didn't know what to do with the money. Finally a lawyer fixed it up for us, and the money is now on deposit to your credits at the Bank of California."

Para was thinking rapidly. He would have liked to ask her who wrote the letters that sent him on his wild goose chase to Portland, and a few other questions, but decided that under no circumstances must the girls be undeceived.

"That's all right, Laura," he observed. "What I can't understand is how Cap Dillon happens to be your grandfather."

"Well, in the letter he sent out by you to our grandaunt he inquired after our mother, his daughter, you know, and which was the first time he had communicated with any of his relatives since the marriage of our parents—which displeased him very much. Then as father left but little money for our support and grandfather informed us in his letter that he had struck it rich up here, we thought," she said, crimsoning, "we'd pay him a visit," she concluded defiantly.

"And how did you get to Anvik before us," queried Para.

"We were afraid to cross the Pacific and came by way of the inside passage to Skagway, thence over the Chilcoot Pass on the railroad to Whitehorse, then down the river. It took us but twelve days to reach Anvik from Seattle."

"And it took us fifteen by way of the lower river," Para commented.

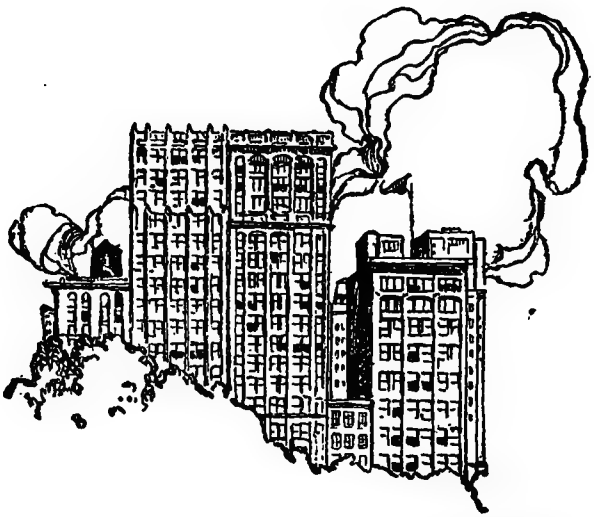
Then he looked Laura squarely in the eyes, which Olive and Paradise had for the most part been doing since the conversation commenced.

"And where does Paradee and me come in at?" he asked.

"We—we—" she glanced swiftly at Olive, "we hope you are both well," she replied mischievously.

Fifteen minutes later Cap Dillon with a hand on Bill Dinning's collar, pushed open the door a few inches and peered within. Then he closed it again and released his hold on his partner.

"Let's mosey, Bill," he said with a twinkle. "I'll be darned if Paradise hasn't given all the others a lot in his native land."



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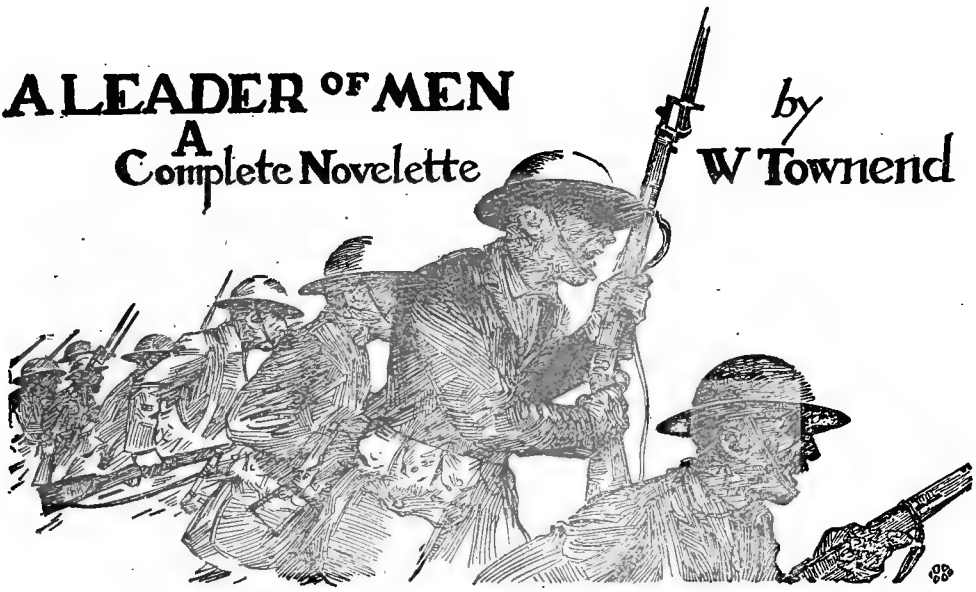
A LEADER OF MEN

A Complete Novelette

by W Townend



Author of "Lieutenant Tony Mallagh," "Mr. Harrington's Wife," etc.

IN THE ordeal of battle as waged under modern conditions, there are many lessons to be learned. The greatest of these lessons is this: all men are equal. The army knows this. Rank, pay, gold crowns and stars, red tabs, stripes, all the distinctions ordained by tradition, are as nothing. Such demand respect, an outward ceremony, but no more. It is the man beneath the uniform that counts, and again—all men are equal.

War is the great leveler, the creator of democracy. Does the shell, crashing into the crowded trench, the dread *minenwerfer*, the bomb, or the whimpering bullet, spare him who has millions, to slay the private soldier with no more than his shilling a day? Neither money nor rank can bribe. In the face of death all men, the general and the private, are on the same level. The men, in spite of the tribute of the upflung hand and arm, know it; so do the officers, in spite of the uniform.

Thus, in war, are all men equal, the prince and the pauper, the private, the peer and the plutocrat. And if in war, why not in peace?

To some few this great truth comes slowly and painfully, with tribulation and suffering, as something to reflect on bitterly as worse than war itself. The British soldier, old army or new, may have his faults, but he knows his worth. The man who would lead him must prove himself a man.

But, putting on one side all theory, this is the story, a story that is perilously like a tract, but which unlike a tract admits of no argument.

LONG centuries ago when the world was at peace and men fought merely with money and broken hearts and ruined lives, and war was no more than a matter of academic discussion, Roy Cathcart Blair, descendant of earls, blue-blooded, the heir to a million sterling, a typical product of his age and environment, had decided that all went well with life. He had few faults to find with things as Providence had created them. His wants, though many, were satisfied. His slightest wish was law in the circle in which he moved.

Criticism he had never known. Not even a public school had stripped from him his pride; his achievements both in the playing fields and class-room had set him on a pedestal. His father, having prepared him early for the greatness that was his, had warned him of his duty to the nation, the duty of the ruling classes. His mother worshiped him. Women, all the women with whom he came in contact, did worship him.

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He was rich enough to choose his own friends: he did this with discretion, and his popularity was far-famed. His wealth, his birth, his looks, his talent, had, he knew, singled him out from among his fellow-men. On all sides, daily, he was met by proofs, many and obvious, that he was born to be a leader, a molder of his country's destinies. Though young, he had made his plans. To such as he, nothing was too good, nothing impossible. A career awaited him.

And in such wise he might have continued, ignorant of the truth and thanking God in his own blind, twentieth-century fashion, that he was not as other men, but for the merciful outbreak of a world-wide war and the end of all established things.

Roy Cathcart Blair obtained a commission. It was, indeed, his for the asking.

"I must join the army," he had said. "It's a nuisance, but it can't be helped."

He was seated at the dinner-table with his father and mother when he made this momentous announcement.

His father, a thin, pale man with a high-bridged nose and shaggy eyebrows, the very incarnation of aristocracy, had shown but little surprise.

"Ah, quite so! Yes. Things don't go well out there by all accounts." He waved a languid hand. "You needn't wait, Parker."

And the butler, soft-footed and bland, withdrew, to spread below in the servants' hall and pantry the news that the war had touched the home at last.

"A waste of time for you, Roy, I fear. The army, even for a year or so, is not what we could have wished. But you're young, nineteen and two months, isn't it? Otherwise I'd speak to the prime minister tomorrow——"

"It must be the army now," said Roy. "It's er—expected of one."

His mother was very white, her lips trembled.

"Oh, Roy! Not the army. You're not strong, and—there are so many others willing and able to go: so many fitted for nothing else, who can be spared. You're different——"

"It's my place," said Roy firmly. "My duty."

"The boy's right," said the father. "It's the duty of one in his station to come forward. If others, less worthy, far beneath him, are taking commissions, it's not for Roy to hold back."

Abraham, willing to offer up his son Isaac as a sacrifice, could not have felt more worthy and great-hearted than did the father of Roy Cathcart Blair at this moment.

"They're in need of officers," said the son. "And I think—" He checked himself modestly. "I think I'd make as good an officer as most men, don't you?"

He fingered a wine-glass thoughtfully. In the distance, muffled by the noise of a passing motor, he could hear a band, playing a military march. It seemed to him an omen.

"A good officer!" exclaimed his mother indignantly. "The very best." And, indeed, who could be better than her son?

"I can manage men," said Roy. "It's a knack, of course." He broke into a light laugh. "I suppose they'll give me a commission, eh?"

And his mother, watching him proudly with moist eyes, thought that never before had she seen him so handsome, so worthy of the name he bore.

"And," said she, as she kissed him, "perhaps, dearest, after all, this horrid war will be over before you've finished your training. I hope so, love. I think it noble of you to offer yourself; I do, indeed."

IN DUE course Roy Cathcart Blair was gazetted. And although his mother's hopes were not fulfilled, although the war lingered and dragged its weary, blood-stained length, not for many long months did Second-Lieutenant R. C. Blair leave England for that land of horror and glory and death and victory, called the front.

Outwardly the army improved him. His back straightened, his eyes became clearer and brighter, the unwholesome pallor left his cheeks, his frame toughened and he grew stronger and healthier.

On the whole, putting aside the first discomforts of life surrounded by acquaintances other than those of his own choice, Roy liked the army. Unattracted by the thought of war, wearied by the repetition of time-worn tasks, there was yet a certain joy of achievement in proving himself a better man than those who were in name

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his equals, and in—greatest of all great tests—ruling others. He, by divine right, an officer and a gentleman, destined to rise high in his country's service, rich, talented—he did not disguise his own capacity—commanded men who moved in obedience to his slightest word.

Some day he would command these men in battle. To that end he must train them, break them to his mastery, showing neither fear nor favor, so that when the time came they would prove themselves worthy of his leadership. Wherefore he worked his platoon without mercy, sparing neither himself nor his men, striving incessantly to show himself keen, and bearing the praise that came to him with modesty, but as his just due.

Ellis, the captain of his company, was pleased.

"You've worked well, Blair," he said. "Very well."

Second-Lieutenant R. C. Blair, though unofficially he considered his company commander somewhat of an ass, thanked him.

"I think No. 5 platoon is better than it was, sir, anyhow."

"Yes," said Ellis. "The men are raw even yet, naturally. But they're good material, much more intelligent than the usual run of recruits, better educated for one thing."

Second-Lieutenant R. C. Blair smiled and raised his eyebrows ever so slightly.

"Indeed, sir! Yes, I dare say they are."

"In my old battalion we'd have given a good deal for such material. After seven years, think what they'd have been! But—remember this—it's the officer who makes good men bad, or bad good. You must show yourself a leader whatever you are."

Roy nodded. In this he felt that Ellis was right.

There were additional benefits to be derived from the army. Roy was not ungrateful for the opportunities that came his way for leave in town, with dinners at the Savoy or Ritz or Carlton, small and hurriedly arranged dances for his especial benefit, the latest revues with the renewal of old friendships at supper afterward, and above all the opportunity, denied in peace time, of showing in public the khaki uniform of an officer with its Sam Browne belt and star.

The uniform earned him privileges and respect, men, ordinary civilians, his seniors, men of affairs, acknowledged their debt, women smiled graciously—for their sake he was perhaps to suffer unknown agonies—soldiers, even those stained with the mud of the trenches in Flanders, saluted him. What more could man desire? The future with all its dark uncertainty he shut out as something unreal.

Soon his parents noticed a change in him and approved. Perfection before, he was now in their eyes a miracle.

"You've improved," said the mother fondly. "I never thought there was any room for improvement. But—you're better-looking, dear boy, broader in the chest—I'm proud of my son."

Roy, flattered, laughed.

"Hope you'll always be proud of me, mater."

"I'm sure of it."

They beamed at him with loving eyes.

"How do you get on with the other officers?" said the father. "Well?"

"Of course," answered Roy. Popularity was his without seeking.

"I'm glad. There are rather a queer crew being given commissions these days, I hear. It's war time, I grant you, and one mustn't be too particular. But what of the men? They, too, are not without their importance."

"The men are not unimportant," said Roy. "But, after all, it's the officer who makes the battalion. You've got to make 'em respect you. You mustn't relax. They don't understand softness. Lord! How can they? They're the tools we use—that's it—the material for winning battles."

"You should make a good officer," said the father. "Your C. O.—I met him last week at the club—told me you're the best subaltern he's got."

"You won't be too hard on the men, dear, will you?" said the mother. "Not even if they *are* stupid. They're not like you, love."

Her son smiled, but did not answer. There were matters that no woman, not even a mother, could understand.

Later, whenever he remembered his mother's forethought, and this was often, he would smile.

From the very first he studied his men and drew his inferences. On the whole, his opinion of those under him was small, He considered them uncouth, stupid,

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unclean and overaddicted to strong drink. As for their opinion of him, that was immaterial.

Their duty was to obey; his to give orders, to find fault, and above all to force them to respect the army, themselves, and their officers. That he was successful was made certain by the results achieved, by the efficiency and smartness of his men, and more than anything by the respect they bore him. He knew that he *had this* respect. At nineteen the perceptions are keen. His firmness inspired respect, as could no other course of action.

SHARKIE'S had been a case in point. Sharkie he had disapproved of from the moment he first set eyes on him on parade. There was something about the man that offended him.

They had come into contact early.

Alf Sharkie, for this was his name, a small, red-headed, freckled recruit, with snub nose and a twisted grin, strolling carelessly in the sunshine, eying his fellow creatures with friendly glance, confident in himself and his surroundings, heard a sharp call.

"Here, you! —— it! Come here!"

A young man—was he an officer or was he not—was glaring at him.

Sharkie, not quite certain in his mind as to what was expected of him, doubtful whether to salute or not, approached cautiously.

"Yes, sir." The "sir" came as an afterthought.

He smiled expectantly. That the officer was looking cross and ill-tempered was no concern of his.

"Don't you know you ought to salute an officer, eh?"

"Yes—sir." He knew that, of course.

"H'm! How long have you been in the army?"

"Three days, sir."

"Why the devil don't you do what you've been told to do, then?"

The words hurt. Sharkie, a man of many friends, was staggered. He gazed blankly at the officer. Not even a policeman would speak to a fellow like that.

"Me—I 'ardly knew by the looks of yer, sir, that yer was an orf'cer."

Roy flushed crimson, and turned to a sergeant who stood beside him.

"An' I wasn't quite certain which 'and, sir——"

The unfortunate Sharkie continued with less confidence. Something was wrong.

"Sergeant," said the young officer, "take this man's name and remind me about him tomorrow. Ignorance is one thing, insolence is quite another."

He walked off quickly without another word.

It was as a result of this brief conversation that the unfortunate Sharkie, a spectacle for all men to behold, a mockery and scorn to his company, stood in the parade-ground, alone, aloof, conspicuous, solemnly saluting all who came his way, officers or men, so that—to quote Second-Lieutenant R. C. Blair's words—"next time there'll be no chance of your forgetting the first duty of a soldier."

"Silly blighter!" said Alf. "Makin' a fool of me like this!"

It began to rain and he caught cold. In wet weather he was liable to catch cold and always had been.

Nevertheless he bore no malice. The army was the army, and if its rules and regulations seemed queer and lop-sided, they would have to be put up with. He had done wrong, and he had taken his punishment. So far as he was concerned, and he, after all, was the sufferer, the matter was ended. The officer had scored. That was the end of it.

Strangely enough, from the point of view of the officer, the matter was merely beginning.

That Private Sharkie, a man of his platoon, a raw recruit, a common, uneducated, unclean-looking little cockney, had dared be impertinent at his expense, had spoken to him as man to man, was to him inconceivable. It was, undoubtedly, true. Wherefore it was his duty to point out to Mr. Sharkie the vast gulf that existed between a common private and his officer: to prove once and for all time that a private soldier had best walk warily for his health's sake.

But from then on in Private Sharkie's person there seemed to Roy to be embodied each fault and failing of the British soldier. He became an object of loathing and contempt, to be corrected for the good of the regiment, to be punished often and to be guided always in the way he should go.

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TO SAY that there were conflicts between Second-Lieutenant Blair and Private Sharkie would be less than the truth. A conflict—so called—must have contesting parties, two at the very least. The very thought of conflict was far from the mind of Private Sharkie.

What chance had a private against an officer, especially when, as seemed obvious, the officer was more often than not in the right? It was hard, nevertheless. Were others inattentive, late by a second on parade, slow at the word of command, lax in the matter of buttons or dust on the backsight of their rifles, there was hope, hope of reproof and no punishment to follow. He, himself, however, suffered the full penalty for all lapses and bore his sorrows in bitter silence.

But what was was—this great truth comforted him enormously—and perhaps in time, he, Alf Sharkie, would learn wisdom and escape the never-ending round of punishment that was his portion. He liked the army, the life of the battalion, the comradeship of his fellows, the long route marches, the tramping of boots on the white roads, the singsongs at night, the cheerful evenings in the canteen, but most decidedly he disliked Second-Lieutenant R. C. Blair, with a passive dislike that it were wiser not to betray openly by words or actions.

For, as he knew well, an officer was an officer, supported by all the power there was, a private was only a private, with few rights, save only the right of wearing khaki and carrying a pack and a rifle and some day—God willing—fighting the Germans in France. And might that day come soon.

His officer was of the same opinion.

Roy, wearying of the long months of training, impatient of the daily round of duty, bored by London, now no longer a city of mirth and light, but dark and mournful and grim, longed for the dispatch of the battalion to France with its division. He had no delusions as to what active service might mean, or so he flattered himself, but he wished to put into practise all that he had learned. Once in France he could test his theories of command and leadership.

He spoke of France often, of his theories seldom. Only on rare occasions did he venture on confidences and then with care. Curiosity led him to put a question that had long been in his mind, to Stirk, a big, silent man, with the ivory scar of a newly-healed wound on his cheek and a slight limp in his leg.

"Do I want to go out again?" he repeated. "No, I don't. But—I've got to. There's no choice. We've got to see this thing through. We've got to win."

"Yes, quite so," said Roy.

He looked at Stirk with a certain surprise. A good chap, the best in the whole mess, but queer.

"I understand, I think—but, is it as bad as all that, then?"

"Worse," said Stirk. "It's hell. But it's good for one. That's the extraordinary part of it. War's hell, there's no getting away from it, but all the same I'm a better man now than I was in August, 1914. I tell you, Blair, when I remember what my opinions were then I'm ashamed of myself. I am, honestly. I was no more than a mass of side, side and incompetence, full of my own dignity, afraid of an honest day's work—I learned, though. I learned —— quick."

Roy studied him curiously. This was interesting. It was seldom that one had the psychological treat of hearing another dissect and lay bare his innermost thoughts.

"If it's not a rude question—how?"

"How! Lord! When I first joined I looked down on the men I was with—I was almost condescending to have joined the army at all." He laughed. "I learned all right. Or rather they taught me."

"You were in the ranks, weren't you?"

"Yes; joined up the day we declared war; a Territorial battalion; did three months' training and was in the trenches in November."

"Oh! I see."

Roy understood. After all, it fitted in perfectly.

"You found out, then, that you—you don't mind me, do you?—that you were no better than the men with you?"

"That's it. The greatest crowd I ever knew. By God, but they were great. There are only about fifty of 'em left now—out of twelve hundred. The others went West for keeps: some at Festubert, some at Neuve Chapelle, some at Loos. One, the toughest of the bunch, was killed dragging me away from the German wire when I got this." He tapped his thigh. "I went home and was given a commission when I came out of hospital."

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"The men *are* great, of course," said Roy. "Ours are tophole. Do anything you tell 'em to. They've got to, of course. But now you're an officer, Stirk, you see the distinction, don't you?"

"What distinction?" asked Stirk.

"Well, the difference. You're on a different plane."

"Yes, and then, no. They're as good as I am, every bit. Better. They have a —— sight rougher time of it, to start with."

"But, my dear old chap—" Roy was puzzled. "Why not? An officer has advantages, I know, but they're his by right. Because I get more money it doesn't say I don't earn it. We're here to lead the men in battle because we're better than they are. That's why it's no use being too soft, too kind-hearted. You've got to put the fear of death into your men. If you do that, they'll follow you without questioning when the time comes. That's discipline in a nutshell."

Stirk was gazing at the boy through half-closed eyes The age of miracles had yet to pass. This pup, fresh from school, rich beyond the dreams of avarice, pampered, petted, soft, steeped in his own conceit, ignorant of war and what war meant, had set himself above his men, had termed them ignorant, slow and stupid. If that were his opinion, Heaven help him! Man wouldn't, that was very sure.

"Is that your honest opinion?" he asked.

"Yes," said Roy, his lips curling. "It is."

"You're wrong, then. Have you ever considered where the officers would be without the men to back them up? You've got to win your men's confidence, Blair, to show them you're worthy to lead 'em—then you've some chance. Not otherwise. And, what's more, you must know those men, and—do you know yours?"

"A —— sight too well," said Roy, and the picture of Sharkie—Sharkie, the unspeakable—came to his mind. "They're the laziest, dirtiest crowd that ever tried to be put on coal fatigue to dodge parade."

"Shows you don't know 'em. You can't, anyway, till you've been in action with 'em. You'll find out then that things aren't as you thought they were. I've been in the ranks, and I know. You can't bully your men, Blair, you've got the wrong idea into your head. The officer exists by virtue of—what? Authority, backed by the esteem of his men. Sounds sloppy, but that's about what it comes to.

"Show the men that you take an interest in 'em, that you don't care a —— for your own comfort until you've looked after theirs, and, by God! there isn't a —— thing they won't do for you. Be firm, if you like, but treat 'em like human beings. And get it out of your head, for your own sake and the sake of the battalion, that you're better than they are. An officer's got to prove himself these days before he can be accepted at his own valuation."

To this Roy laughed with the easy tolerance of the man who knows and bears no malice.

"That's all right, maybe, from the private's point of view. It isn't mine. You own that you've got to be strict with 'em, don't you? Do you know Sharkie, for instance? He's in No. 5 platoon, so you wouldn't. He's an undersized little rat with an everlasting grin; dirty, untidy, impudent and inclined to drink. What can you do with a man like that, if you don't punish him?

"You can't handle a battalion with kid gloves on. Show that you're top dog, and you've got men like Sharkie eating out of your hand. I know. I've proved it."

"Righto!" said Stirk. "Prove it when you're in France, then. You'll find that you're mistaken, of course. You can't drive men as well educated as you are yourself, can you?"

Roy stood up and yawned. As well educated as himself! Was the man crazy?

"So long, Stirk, I'll see you later. Thanks very much for all the philosophy. It does you credit."

Stirk gazed after him with a serious expression in his plain, square-jawed face. He was sorry for Blair, poor devil! He would learn the lesson in due course; the men would teach him. If he refused to learn willingly, then the teaching would be somewhat painful.

THE division left for France by way of Southampton and Le Havre, early in 1916, and in the third week of March Roy's battalion entered the trenches for a three days' course of instruction in the art of modern warfare by a veteran Scotch battalion of another division.

In a muddy trench leading from the

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support to the firing-line, Roy Cathcart Blair, by this time the possessor of a second star that marked his promotion to lieutenant, received his first inkling that all was not what he had expected. Plodding along at the heels of the guide, a taciturn, dark-browed Highland sergeant who invited no conversation, with the men of his platoon following close behind, one after the other, he came to a turning where shell-fire had broken the walls of chalk and filled the bottom of the trench with débris.

The guide turned.

"Thaur's a bad piece here, sir, at the bend. An' thaur's a sniper yonder that's on the watch for the sicht of a heid. Ye'll be carefoo', please, an' keep low."

The tone was respectful, but peremptory. Roy was nettled. Why the devil was he speaking like that to an officer? Nevertheless, his advice was sound.

"Pass the word back to keep your heads down," he said over his shoulder.

Stuck on the side of the trench by means of a rusty nail was a scrap of paper on which was written in indelible pencil:

BEWARE OF SNIPERS,
KEEP DOWN.

The guide bent low and crossed the danger spot. Roy hesitated, filled with a sudden stubborn feeling of resentment. An officer had no right to show himself afraid. There were certain risks one had to face, whether one wished or no.

The Highlander glanced back at him; a sardonic smile seemed to be playing about the corners of his mouth, as though to express his amusement at the sight of an officer showing fear.

Roy hesitated no longer. His back straight, his chin well up, his heart beating, he passed the gap. Something whipped by his steel helmet and pinged against the chalk opposite. And, in spite of all his resolution, though he knew the bullet had gone, Roy ducked his head. The sniper had been watching, after all.

"That," said the Highlander sourly, "is the damndest, daftest trick I ever saw, refusin' to listen to guid advice. Dinna ye ken thaur's Gerrmans yonder tryin' tae kill ye? Ye maun dae as yer tauld. Mebbe the next time ye'll nae be sae lucky. If ye'd been shot it waud ha' sairved ye richt."

"Who're you talking to?" flared Roy.

"You," said the Highlander. "For your ain guid."

He stalked on in silence. And Roy, furious with the Highlander and himself, felt as though he had been shamed forever. Never before in his twenty years had he, Roy Cathcart Blair, been spoken to like that. A *whizz-bang* that burst on the parapet an hour later, killing a private and sending Roy to his knees under a shower of stones and chalk, filled him with less actual fear than did the grim, plain-spoken words of the Highland sergeant.

That night, while waiting in the darkness to be taken out between the lines, he heard a low voice near at hand whisper his name

"'Oo? Blair!"

"Aye."

"Did yer hear that Jock tellin' him off today?"

"Aye. Serve 'im right. Silly young idiot!"

"Not much loss to us, though, if 'e had been killed, eh?"

A sudden *Verry* light threw a brilliant glare over the trench. From the shadow Roy gazed on the snub nose of Sharkie and heard him chuckle.

"Showin' off, eh? Didn't want to do as 'e was told, just becorse it was a sergeant tellin' 'im."

An officer touched Roy on the elbow.

"Are you ready? We'll go out now and I'll show you their wire. This way."

But that whispered conversation heard in the darkness was a blow to his self-esteem, a torture to be borne in silence until such time as he could assert his powers. Sharkie again. Always Sharkie. He might laugh, but he would learn, and quickly, that the gulf that divides the officer from the private may not be bridged.

Humiliated and angry, Roy steeled his heart. Discipline, as he knew, would win the war. What was right on the parade-ground was right in the trenches. That his men, though new to the line, unused to shell-fire, wet through and hungry, were doing their best, moved him not. Blind to what might be, unmindful that the day might come when he himself should stand in need of help, he was hard, coldly vindictive, full of scorn for the incompetents Fate had given him.

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THEY left the trenches after three wet, miserable days. As the company splashed down the long muddy communication trench that led through a ruined village to the main road and open country, Roy listened gloomily to Stirk who followed behind him.

"They'll train on," he was saying. "You see if they don't. They're great. I've never seen a crowd stand shelling—a new crowd—as well as my platoon did last night. Five casualties—and they never showed they'd the wind up. I tell you, Blair, I'm proud of 'em. When we want 'em, they'll not disappoint us."

"I should think they wouldn't," said Roy. "They'd better not."

Ahead of him the men stopped suddenly.

"What's the matter in front there?"

"Some one stuck in the mud, sir," said a corporal.

"What the devil are those men playing at?" Impatient at the delay, he growled angrily, "Who is it?"

The soldiers waited, silent, tired, with drooping heads, while the rain poured down in gusts and the wind shook the bare branches of the trees beside the trench.

"Buck up, you chaps!" said Stirk.

From around the bend came the sound of voices arguing.

"It's no good. You fellers 'ad better go on."

Roy recognized the voice and made his way past the waiting soldiers to where Sharkie was leaning against the side of the trench.

"What the devil's the matter with you, Sharkie?" he said. "What are you keeping us waiting here for? Get on at once!"

Sharkie, his eyes bright in his pale, unshaven face, looked at him sideways.

"Can't," he said.

"Why not? And say 'sir' when you speak to an officer."

"Can't go no quicker than what I am—sir." The "sir" dragged out slowly as an afterthought was an added insult. "Heel's raw an' bleedin', wet feet an' the boot rubbin' it, that's 'ow it 'appened." He choked back a cough. "Knocked it this mornin', too."

"You could walk well enough if you wanted to," said Roy. "If you think you can hang up two platoons coming out of the trenches because you're too —— lazy to push on, you're making a big mistake."

"I'm not 'angin' up no one purposely. I'm willin' to do my best an' come on as fast as possible. You don't think I'm settin' 'ere for fun, do you—sir?"

"Oh! get on and don't jaw so much or you'll know the reason. There's not another man in the battalion who'd make so much fuss over a skinned heel. Get a move on at once. Understand! You're no good—and never will be. You're on active service now and the sooner you realize it the better."

Sharkie gave the officer another of his sidelong glances, laughed and stood up.

"—— sight too active," he muttered. "But thank yer kindly, sir, for lettin' me rest a while."

He wiped the rain off his face and limped on through the water, coughing.

"Give us yer rifle, Alf," said the man behind him. "It'll make things easier for yer."

Roy felt as though he were suffocating.

"That —— miserable rat!" he said to Stirk. "My God! But some of these beasts need nursing. Wanting to stop because of a bad heel—did you hear him? Did you hear what he said?"

"Perhaps his heel was bad," said Stirk. "Even a private can be speaking the truth now and again."

Roy did not answer. Stirk sensed his disapproval and grinned. He was learning, of course, and learning quickly.

That night Roy came to the door of his room in the estaminet which was their billet.

"Stirk," he said. "May I come in?"

He felt that he must speak to some one. Ellis was out of the question. He had been rather tired of Stirk lately, but Stirk was the only one from whom he could ask advice.

"May I speak to you?"

"Fire away, son," said Stirk. "Take a seat."

"It's about today. What am I to do?"

"I don't understand," said Stirk.

Roy seated himself in a rickety chair. By the light of the candle his face was gray and lined.

"Did you hear that —— little rat today? Sharkie! He gave me more lip than I've ever taken from any man in all my life. What shall I do?"

"Nothing," said Stirk.

"Nothing! Good God! Why, man, he

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made fun of me! Laughed at me before the others. Stirk, I'm going to have that man made an example of. I've stood it too long. You heard him, didn't you?"

Stirk shook his head.

"I never moved from where I was standing—I heard you talking——"

"Well, the others heard—the men. I've got witnesses."

"Look here, Blair," said Stirk quickly. "What good is it going to do? Things aren't the same in the trenches as they are out. You can't expect them to be. Do you know what will happen if you run Sharkie? Can't you guess? Every mother's son of 'em will swear himself blue in the face that the man never said a single word of what you say he did. And of course each man in the platoon knows exactly what you said to Sharkie.

"You'd no right to say it. The men are in this war for the same reason that you and I are. They joined to beat the Germans, not to be treated like dirt. And if they go back on you, you're done. You might just as well be dead and buried as feel that your men won't follow you."

The boy nodded.

"So you did hear what Sharkie said, then?"

"Yes," said Stirk. "If you want to know the exact truth, I did."

"And you won't back me up?"

"For your own sake, I'll see you damned before I do anything of the kind."

For a brief space there was a deep silence in the bare little room; only the rain pattered against the window-panes, and the wheels of an ammunition column rumbled on the paved street below, and the dull mutter of distant guns came with the wind.

And then, shrugging his shoulders, Roy Cathcart Blair, by right of birth and breeding a leader of men, walked quietly away.

TO PRIVATE SHARKIE, seated on the straw of a dark and windy barn, with the flickering candles casting great shadows on the broken roof, the happenings of the past three days seemed but as dreams. From time to time a cough shook him: he had a headache and a sore throat and without ceasing his heel throbbed with angry persistence. He was cold and unhappy and tired.

War was not what he had expected. He would do his bit with the best of them, of course; that was his right and duty. But he wondered dully whether his strength was all that he had fancied. Three days in the trenches, three quiet days—oh, yes, the Jocks had told him they were quiet—had knocked him out: left him weak and helpless, disinclined even for beer and the delights of the estaminets. He raged inwardly. The training at home had been severe. But this! Gawd! Could he last out? He doubted it. It wasn't right for a man to be crocked up as easily as he was. It was the rain and the cold that had done it, and the heel on top of everything.

Sharkie began to cough.

The heel was the worst. He would go sick in the morning. And—here he laughed—probably he'd get a No. 9 and be told that he was fit for duty, medicine and duty. He was, too, fit for anything, so long as they'd give him a chance.

A frown came into his wizened face.

The officer, Blair, the boy with the cold eyes and hard voice, had called him no good. Why? Because he could scarcely walk. He'd stuck it, all the same, though the heel had been bleeding the whole way back to billets. He'd lamed himself to show he'd more grit than they thought he had. But—Blair now—Blair always had been hard on him. Why? What in God's name should have set Blair against him? He had done him no harm. From the very start of things Blair had given him no chance. None at all.

And then the train of his thoughts was broken.

"That man's no good. He wants to be poisoned." Kearney, the man next him, black-haired and tanned like a gipsy, was speaking. "You're thinking of Blair, eh? Could see it, Alf, by your face. Don't you fret, old pal. He'll get wot's comin' to him some day, you see."

Sharkie came to himself.

" 'Oo, Blair? 'E's all right, really. 'Spose I am a bit of a noosance."

"You!" Kearney laughed and went on polishing his rifle. "He's the rottenest, meanest little hound that ever put on an orf'cer's tunic and called himself a man. If the others was like him, where would the battalion be? What good could we do? Here, Hutchinson, you know the army or pretends yer do, come here! Have you ever met an orf'cer like Blair?"

"I've met a many," said the big man

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slowly. "All sorts; bad, good and indiff'rent, but I've never yet in nineteen long years an' three campaigns besides this seen one on his level."

His eyes, filled with the wisdom of deep experience, glowed in the candle light.

"An orf'cer 'oo looks on 'is men like dogs ain't fit to lead 'em."

"He's just a kid, all side an' swelled head, with the airs of a major-general lookin' down on his equals," said Kearney.

"Equals!" said Sharkie, round-eyed, startled by such heresy.

"Yes, equals!" said Hutchinson. "I was out 'ere before with the first battalion, remember, so I know. We're as good as 'e is, every bit. Wait till 'e wants us; wait till we're under 'eavy fire; wait till we go over the top. He'll understand, then, if 'e don't now. Yes, orf'cers an' men, equals."

IT WAS unfortunate for Private Sharkie, and even more so for Lieutenant R. C. Blair, that Sharkie at ten minutes past nine on a still night in April should have slipped out of the back door of an estaminet into his arms.

"What are you doing?" said Roy, gripping him by the elbow. "Who are you?"

"Shorry, chum—" And then on Sharkie's fuddled mind there dawned the full enormity of what would happen. " 'Strewth, it's bally orf'cers!"

With Roy was Ellis, smoking a cigar and at peace with all the world.

"Who've you got there, Blair?" he asked.

"One of my platoon," came the answer. "Sharkie."

Sharkie shivered and clutched despairingly at the bottle hidden under his tunic; a bottle he had purchased for Private Kearney, who, being on battalion headquarters guard, had few chances for relaxation and refreshment.

"He's drunk," continued the cold voice of his captor. "It's a quarter past nine and he's not in his billet—and he's got a bottle of something with him."

Ellis stirred the white dust with the point of his foot. It was most reprehensible, of course. Sharkie should have known better. What a —— fool the man must be to have come out of the estaminet without making sure he was unobserved! And now Blair had caught him and there would be rows and inquiries and trouble all 'round for the N. C. O.'s and every one. That was the worst of Blair; he was too conscientious. Why hadn't he *not* seen as any one else would have done?

"H'm!" he grunted. "Red-handed, eh! Why on earth they don't keep to the proper hours I don't know."

"It's time an example was made of some one," said Roy. "This has been going on ever since the brigade came out of the line."

"Ye-es, quite so, but—" There was a note of appeal almost in Ellis's voice. "I suppose, Blair, we couldn't—" He spoke in a low whisper. "We couldn't overlook it, could we? I don't mind this time—for your sake. He's one of your platoon, isn't he? And it's barely nine, you know, when all's said and done."

"No sir," said Roy firmly "I assure you, it wouldn't do. The man's been asking for trouble for weeks. He's the most unsatisfactory man I have; no good to me or to any one else."

Ellis, good man, sighed.

"All right. If you wish it."

Sharkie's last hope departed. He was not drunk, he was certain: not in the head, anyway. He could think even more clearly than usual; it was his legs that worried him. If only he had not been stopped and kept standing in the road he could have walked quietly and respectably to his billet. The delay was too much for him. His knees began to sag and he yielded to a sudden and irresistible desire to seat himself on the ground against the wall of the estaminet.

"You see, sir," said Roy. "And this makes about the fourth time since he joined."

"The—the guar'-room's opp'sit, shir—I'm aw'right, qui' aw'right—itsh me legsh—shen' shome one to fesh me. I wo' move—'shmatt'r o' fac'—I carn' move."

And there they left him, unrepentant.

Thus it was that Private Kearney and the corporal of the guard were compelled to finish the contents of the bottle under the stars before escorting the prisoner to the guard-room.

As a result of his deviation from the straight and narrow path Sharkie was punished with fourteen days No. 1 field punishment, and the iron of bitterness entered his soul.

"It's always Blair," he said. "Always. Some o' these days I'll be tellin' 'im what 'e is. 'E got me my No. 1, o' course. 'E

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made old Ellis run me. Any one else wouldn't 'ave seen me comin' out o' that there pub, at all. 'E must, o' course. The little sweep."

He laughed, but broke into a fit of coughing.

They were in the trenches again and he sat at the entrance to a dugout, basking in the May sunshine.

"He had you that time, fair enough," said his friend, Kearney. "For, Alf, between you an' me an' that gas gong, you was as drunk as a boiled owl."

"I dessay, I was. An' I dessay I will be again, too. If it 'ad been any one else 'oo copped me I shouldn't 'ave cared. But to get No. 1 field punishment for 'im 'ud nark any man. 'E passed me once an'—well, I shut me bloomin' eyes so 'e wouldn't see 'ow I 'ate 'im."

"He's no use, anyhow," said Kearney.

"I didn't bear 'im no pertic'ler grudge," went on Sharkie, "before, an' I don't now, not for gettin' me clinked, that is. But it was that on top of ev'rything else. I was drunk, o' course, but—Lord, 'ow'd I know it was after nine, an' 'ow'd I know that —— *vang blong* 'ud go to me legs?"

"He's not fit to polish young Jackie Stirk's boots, he ain't. I don't suppose he ever earnt a penny in all his blinkin' life. He ain't got the brain, that's his trouble."

" 'E calls me a bad soldier," continued Sharkie dreamily. "I ain't. He's never yet caught me doin' anything really bad. He got me two or three times when I fust joined for bein' dirty on parade, but wot's that? I'm as good a man as any in the company—I'll give points to most in bombin' any day. An' clean—you've never seen me wiv a speck o' mud on me by p'rade the mornin' after we come out of the trenches, 'ave yer? Blair even can't find fault wiv me. 'E tries to, but 'e can't. I'm as good a soldier as any in the 'ole bloomin' battalion, barrin' the pain in me chest, an' he knows it."

He checked himself, overtaken by a paroxysm of coughing. He put his hand to his lips and Kearney caught sight of the bright red smear in the sunlight.

"What the blazes is that?" he said sharply. "Look here, Alf, you oughter go sick. Understand?"

"Rubbish!" said Sharkie.

Kearney looked at him with a queer expression in his eyes. For the first time he was seeing his friend in a new light. The careless, light-hearted gaiety that had made Sharkie popular had dropped off him. His face was the color of the yellowish chalk of the trenches; in his cheeks the bones showed plainly; his eyes were large and bright like a sparrow's and set in deep hollows. Supposing that Sharkie....But that was ridiculous, of course.

"Dunno', chum, but it seems ter me—it seems ter me you ain't fit to be out here at all. You're sick, that's what's the matter."

Sharkie laughed.

"Sick! I ain't sick. Got a cold, that's all. Yer don't want ter get rid of me, do yer, Kearney? If I goes sick, wot 'appens? I give young Blair a chance to make fun 'o me; to say I'm no soldier. Not me, son. I'd die before I'd let 'im run me again. Yus, I would. That's Gospel truth, it is. I'm as good a man as him, ev'ry bit, an' 'e'll know it some day if 'e don't now. 'Ark at that!"

A shell from a German heavy battery went wailing overhead toward the village at the back of the trenches.

"We're equal, 'im an' me, when that's comin', ain't we?"

FATE plays strange pranks with mortal man. Sharkie had boasted that never again would he swerve aside from the strict path of duty. He had had his warning. If only to spite Blair, he would give no cause for complaint. Better to die a thousand deaths than give any man a chance to call him a bad soldier.

Four nights later B Company was in the firing-line. It was a warm, calm night; the moon shone softly down from a cloudless sky; the soft breeze bore with it the scent of Spring flowers and warm earth; yet Private Sharkie on sentry duty on the fire-step peered out over the sand-bagged parapet into the open spaces of no man's land and shivered with the cold.

There was something the matter with him, he knew. His limbs could scarce bear his weight, his head ached as though with the thunder of many batteries, his lungs were racked with sharp pains. He felt tired and worn out and very weak. His senses wandered.

And, leaning forward against the sandbags, his head resting on his arm, his rifle by his side, he was found by his platoon commander.

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"Who's that man, Sergeant?" said Roy quickly.

"Sharkie, sir."

"It would be, of course. What the devil's he doing?"

He tugged furiously at the greatcoat. "—— it! He's fast asleep."

Sharkie shivered, and raising his head, looked down at the officer.

"Come down off the fire-step," said Roy in a tone of cold fury. "At once. You, Kearney, get up in his place. Understand, Sharkie! Now, what in —— have you got to say for yourself?"

Sharkie, his steel helmet on the back of his head, his face very pale, did not answer.

"Asleep at his post in the front line," continued Roy. "My God! It makes me sick."

One of his men, trained by him through long weary months, asleep on duty! That it should be Sharkie in no way lessened his feelings of wild, incredulous anger.

"Well, I'm waiting."

"No, sir; not asleep, sir—beggin' yer pardon." The little man spoke wearily as though the matter was of no real interest. "I'm feelin' sick, sir." And he shook with a fit of coughing.

"That's no answer," said the officer. "Weren't you the man who told me some —— lie or other about bad feet? Nothing but excuses. You were found asleep at your post, and you're under arrest. You know the penalty, don't you?"

"I know the penalty. Yes," said Sharkie. "I does. It don't signify, some'ow. I ain't got long to live. I'm done in, whatever 'appens. I ain't grumblin'. Asleep at my post, eh? An' it was you wot found me, o' course. Well, I weren't asleep, Mr. Blair. Think I'd do that? Me! Everything went black an' I couldn't see; that's all. I'm bloody queer, an'——"

He swayed on his feet. The sergeant steadied him.

"That 'ull do. Not so much of it."

"Take him to the provost-sergeant," said Roy. "If you're sick, as you say you are, you'll have every chance of telling your symptoms to the medical officer in the morning."

He watched Sharkie, smiling in the queer twisted way he knew so well, and then heard in a terrified, breathless instant the mad shriek of a shell approaching. Dazed, moving by instinct, without conscious reflection, Roy threw himself on the bottom of the trench. There was the deafening roar of the explosion, a burst of flame, and an avalanche of scattered chalk as the side of the trench collapsed. Roy, stunned and shaken, marveling that he still lived, stood up.

"Every one all right?" he asked.

Through the thick smoke he saw huddled in the angle of the fire-bay Sharkie, lying on his side. The sergeant was holding his right arm at the elbow, cursing softly.

A man dashed past him and dropped on his knees by Sharkie's side.

"Alf—you're not hurt, are yer?"

Roy, still dazed by the shock, saw that it was Kearney.

"My God! Alf—" Kearney began to whimper. "He's dead. Look at him! He's dead."

"Are you all right, Sergeant?" said Roy hoarsely.

"Nothin' much, sir. It's smashed my elbow. Here, Carr, put a field dressin' on, will you?"

"Better go and have it dressed properly as soon as you can. And, you, Hutchinson, go and fetch the stretcher-bearers."

And then, before he could gather his scattered thoughts, he became aware of Private Kearney glaring at him.

"You!" whispered Kearney, gripping him by the arm. "You killed him. That's what you did. As sure as though you'd put a bullet into him. Listen to me, sir, a minute—no, don't move—it wouldn't do for any one to hear us, would it? Bad for discipline, eh? Do yer know what was wrong with him? He'd got what they calls T. B. You understand that, don't yer?

"He was dyin' an' he stuck it rather than go sick and run the risk of you thinkin' he wasn't doin' his best. You think you're a kind of a tin god, don't yer? You're not. You're not fit to wear a Lance-Jack's stripe. You're hated by all of us—you think you're too good for the likes of us, don't you? But—by Gawd—that poor little chap that's gone West was a better man than you, by a —— sight.

"An' that's all, an' it's more of the truth than you've ever heard in all your rotten life, I warrant. No one's ever spoken the truth to you before, an' what are yer goin' to do about it? Nothin'. You haven't the pluck."

He dropped Roy's arm and climbed once more on to the fire-step.

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Roy pulled himself together. What was he going to do about it? Nothing. Kearney was right. He had been spoken to by a private, by an ordinary, common private, in a way that no officer should be spoken to, and he could do—nothing. He hadn't the pluck. Kearney was right in that, too. He couldn't face it. He, an officer, to be spoken to like that by one of his men!

THOUGH he might hide it by a careless air of unconcern toward the world, Sharkie's death had frightened him. He felt subdued, weary of everything, and all at once years older. Pride bade him adopt an even sterner and more rigorous attitude toward his men. There must be no slackening, no wavering, merely because Sharkie was dead; discipline was discipline, and Sharkie's death had been no fault of his.

Nevertheless he was nervous and uneasy; he had lost all confidence in himself. In the glances of his men he could read contempt. Kearney was right, they hated him.

Stirk, quietly observant, missing nothing of what was happening in the company, spoke to him in their dugout. Ellis was asleep, the other subalterns were out on duty.

"Blair, you're looking rotten."

"Me!"

Roy, surprised, glanced at him across the plank table, littered with trench maps and note books and lit by two candles stuck in bottles. There was a curious pity in Stirk's face that vexed him.

"I'm all right," he said.

"You're not," said Stirk. "I'm not blind."

It was the first time for some weeks that they had spoken on other than topics of general interest.

"You remember Sharkie, don't you?" said Roy.

"Yes, killed, isn't he?"

"Two nights ago. I'd put him under arrest for being asleep at his post. And then a shell came and knocked him out. He was sick, I believe—but what could I do? If I find a sentry leaning forward on the parapet with his head in his arms and his eyes shut, I can't do anything else than run him in, can I? If he was ill, he shouldn't have been in the trenches at all."

"You know how the men hate going sick," said Stirk, resting his elbows on the table. "They won't if they can dodge it."

"He ought to have seen a doctor. It's not fair on me. —— it, Stirk, from the way the men look at me, you'd think I'd killed the man."

Stirk watched him closely. The boy had altered. He looked older and thinner; lines showed in his face, there was a hopeless, hunted expression in his eyes. The lesson was coming home to him, Stirk knew. He, Roy Cathcart Blair, a millionaire's only son, destined by his parents for Heaven only knew what greatness, had failed to gain the respect of the men under him.

"It's your methods that are all wrong, of course."

A flush came into the boy's face.

"My methods aren't wrong. How could they be?" There was a strange, uneven petulance in his tone. "I must have misjudged Sharkie. I'll own that much. But my methods are right. Can you deny that No. 5 platoon's the smartest in the battalion? I trained 'em. They know when I speak that I mean business. Do they hate me?

"I don't care a —— if they do or they don't, so long as they do their work. I've heard whispers—yes, Stirk, it's true—that they think I'm cruel. Maybe I am. I have to be. I say you've got to be cruel in the army. Can you take your men across the open under heavy fire without being cruel to them? You can't do it by being soft with them."

Stirk nodded and let the matter drop. The old tag came into his mind—"Whom the gods wish to destroy they first make mad."

"Have a cigaret?" he said. "They're not bad. You're a good little chap at heart, Blair, that's what makes everything so —— extraordinary."

Roy went about his work, outwardly unmoved by what had happened, always efficient, showing no favor, doing his duty, and insisting that those under him should do the same, sparing neither himself, his N. C. O's., nor his men. And always he could sense hostility hidden under the respect due to an officer. And although he hid it from himself, so far as what was obvious could be hid, it hurt consumedly.

Had he been too harsh? Perhaps! But with Sharkie, he had taken the right course, the only course possible. He had made of

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Sharkie, uneducated, ill-disciplined, coarse, unclean, something approaching a soldier, in spite of himself. Yet Sharkie had died hating him.

In very weariness of soul he prayed for action. Impatient of the dull routine and stagnation of the trenches, even though of nights there came chances of work between the lines, he longed for that day when he should justify weeks of bitterness by leading his men to victory. There could be no doubts as to results, and though discipline in the army might be harsh, it was the discipline that he preached and practised that would secure obedience in the turmoil of a battle.

THE days were warmer now, with blue skies and bright sunshine. The fields were gay with corn flowers, poppies, daisies and buttercups. Even amid the thunder of guns the song of the skylark came clear and sweet to the men in the trenches who, waiting grimly, watched through periscopes the white chalk opposite which marked the German front-line trench.

And, however much they might hate the trenches, the danger, the long nights of toil, the scarcity of rations, the never-changing diet of stew and bully and biscuits, they too were filled with the confidence of victory. Give them their chance, and they would beat the best the Germans could produce. Why not? Could the Germans stand before the onslaught of British bayonets?

Roy heard them boasting of the day when they would be sent forward with the bayonet to drive the Germans back toward the Rhine.

" 'Tis the likes of us that wins battles." Old Hutchinson was speaking one noon, leaning back on the fire-step and watching the smoke of his clay pipe drifting upward. "The rank an' file. I've seen it, an' I knows wot I'm talkin' about."

"Wot d'yer mean by that, 'Utch?" broke in another voice.

"I've no faith in the orf'cers we 'ave now-a-days, young Kempton. That's wot I means. The old orf'cers were trained to their work, an' they're dead; Mons, Le Catoo, the Marne, the Aisne, Wipers—they went West like the' ole of the old army did, becorse they 'ad to an' becorse they was men. Now they're gone it's the bloomin' rank and file wot 'ull win this blinkin' war by theirselves."

Roy, hidden from the view of the men, seated on the steps leading to his dugout, writing a letter to his mother, frowned.

Poor fools! Was this their real opinion? Did they imagine that alone, without leaders, trained to lead, they could win battles? It was the officers who gave life to the attack, strength and resolution to the defense. Without officers a battalion would resemble a ship without a helmsman.

Nevertheless, gradually, imperceptibly, in the days that followed, a dim suspicion forced itself into the boy's consciousness. Perhaps, after all, he was not so infallible as he had thought? Was it that he was in truth no better than any other soldier? The idea almost frightened him. It was ridiculous, absurd! Of course he was better. He must be, as must every man who came of the same stock. His training, his opportunities, his surroundings, had all fitted him for the leading of men in battle. But even so there came again the thought to torment him, that he, R. C. Blair, was no better, no more a man, than such as had been Private Sharkie. And this was something else to worry over.

Sooner or later, inevitable as the rising of the sun, there comes the day when even the most impatient and efficient of battalions is put to the test that proves its worth.

At about the hour of two o'clock one dark morning the German guns, strangely silent throughout the night, opened a heavy fire.

The first few shells fell short, sending a shower of earth and stones into the trench; another pitched just clear of the parados, the next, shrieking like some monstrous aerial express, landed into a fire-bay and burst with a savage, nerve-racking roar, killing or maiming all within reach.

There was a wild shout of "Stretcher-bearers wanted!", some piteous moaning, and after that the shells came thick and fast until the tortured ground shook and shivered with the pounding of iron and the night air seemed alive with screechings and wailings and snarlings as of furies unchained. From time to time mingled with the high explosives that smashed the trench to fragments amid a riot of noise, there would come the whirring and whanging of heavy shrapnel bursting overhead and spattering down fragments of metal.

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Dazed and shaken by the explosions on every side, choked by the fumes and smoke, Roy labored to keep together the broken remnants of his platoon, persuading and threatening by turns, hiding his own terrors by hard words.

Up and down the battered length of trench, known to the battalion as the Loop, he ran; where all trace of fire-bays and traverses had vanished he drove the men forward to the cover of deep shell holes.

"Come on out of that, you fellows! There's no shelter there. Get into those craters in front, quick! You hear me, don't you? Well, then, why don't you do what you're told? Take that Lewis gun, you—Corporal Smith, —— you, wake up! Be a man, for God's sake! What the ——'s the good of crying before you're hurt! Can't stand it! You've —— well got to stand it Get a move on, or, by ——, I'll make you!"

In a stretch of trench that bore even yet some semblance to a fire-bay he stumbled over Ellis, peering through the dark pall of smoke toward the enemy's lines.

"That you, sir?" he said.

"Thank God! you're alive. I heard you were killed, Blair! Pretty bad, isn't it?"

"We're losing a good many in the Loop, I'm afraid. I've sent all I can into shell holes in front. It's safer. I didn't know what to do quite." He laughed ruefully. "B Company's hard hit. But, by ——, they're standing it well. I'm proud of them."

There was a wild shriek, growing louder and louder, and they crouched down as the shell burst behind the next traverse.

"That's near," said Ellis. "—— near!"

"What are we going to do?" said Roy thickly, spluttering out earth. "Stay here?"

"Yes. No orders to retire. All the cables have gone. No runners can get through that barrage, either. The supports are getting it, too."

"Our artillery's giving 'em hell, all the same."

"Yes, but that won't stop Fritz from coming over—he's smashed all our wire—and we must hold the Loop at all costs. You're doing good work, Blair. Stick it a while longer! I've got to get back to the other side now; near the new cut where Stirk is. So long!"

And although sentiment in the army is most properly a quality to be despised they gripped hands. Then Ellis turned and made off into the smoke and dust of bursting shells.

Roy gulped. A good man, Ellis. One of the best.

As the subaltern crawled back through the shell holes over the débris of the trench, a dim figure staggered blindly in the direction of the supports.

"You! What the ——do you think you're doing?" Roy rushed forward and dragged at his arm. "Get into the trench again! Do you hear me? If you don't I'll shoot you."

The man broke into deep, uncontrollable sobbing.

"Lemme go, chum. Lemme go where I can die in peace. I'm no coward, but I'm goin' mad. They've got me. They says there's a hell—I'm in it now. Oh, man, let me go for the love o' Gawd!"

Roy, sickened, saw that he was blind and loosed his grip. The man plunged forward. Shrapnel burst overhead and the blind man collapsed in a huddled heap.

And then Roy's nerves, strung to high tension, snapped. He cried out and fell into a deep shell crater where with fingers in his ears so that he might not hear the thunder and crash of the high explosives he lay and shivered. He felt that he too was going mad. Was this war? This hell! The strain was too much for flesh and blood to bear. Did they expect him to let himself be killed or worse, be maimed for life, and live half dead?

He lowered his hands and raised his head.

"So it's you, is it?" said a voice.

Roy found himself looking at Kearney, wild-eyed and disheveled, who crouched amid the chalk of the crater.

"You're not wounded, are yer?" said Kearney thickly.

"No," said Roy. "I'm not."

He scarcely recognized the sound of his own voice.

"I've just about had all I can stand," said Kearney. "If the Germans come now they can bloody well have me."

Something stirred in Roy's mind. Kearney was talking nonsense. If the Germans came. . . But they wouldn't come. How could they?

"You mustn't talk like that," he said sharply.

"Mustn't—why not?"

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Kearney was like a man under the influence of liquor. And Roy recalled Kearney's friend, Sharkie; Sharkie in the road outside the estaminet, drunk and argumentative, Sharkie who was dead and buried.

"Because you've got to drive them back. Understand! Because—I'll make you!"

Kearney scowled darkly, then he began to laugh.

"Hark at him! Why you're as bad as me, every bit. Scared stiff, you are. Think I don't know! If the Germans come, —— it, you'll run same as I'll run. Hullo, sounds like the guns have lifted."

To Roy his words came of a sudden more clearly and he realized almost with unbelief that the shells were bursting far behind them. Nevertheless the fact bore no significance, his mind was groping with more important problems. Kearney, one of his platoon, a common soldier—that in itself galled even at such a time and in such a place—classed him, an officer, with himself as a coward, willing—nay, eager—to surrender. The thought was like a knife-thrust. A coward! He, R. C. Blair, a coward, after all that he had done!

And then, hearing shouts, he scrambled out of the crater and stood upright, unmindful of cover.

IN THE light of the Summer's dawn, he saw the heads of men, steel helmeted, peering from the shell holes, and the line of broken trench, torn and shattered like some monstrous furrow, thrown up in mounds of chalk, with the dead lying in every posture in front of the remnants of barbed wire, and further off, advancing over the rough ground, gray masses of German infantry.

A coward!

He ran forward. He had been called a coward! Was he? Had he too given way to fear? He laughed aloud, rejoicing that the time for action had come at last.

"Now then, B Company, stand by!" he shouted.

He dropped into another shell hole in which were two men who, with their rifles at the shoulders, rested their elbows in the chalk and waited. From the left came a crackle of musketry.

"Let 'em have it," said Roy. "As hard as you can."

By his side was a dead man. He grabbed his rifle and felt for cartridge clips in the pouches.

"Aim low, you men."

The German line came on slowly, and the rapid fire of the infantry and the cracking shrapnel swept their ranks.

Roy and the men with him fired automatically, intent only on putting as many bullets as possible into the dense masses ahead.

And then, Roy could never tell how it happened, things went wrong. Through the smoke, dirty, dispirited-looking men came running back; his men, men of B Company, No. 5 platoon, in threes and fours.

Not understanding, he crammed a fresh clip of cartridges into his magazine.

"Wot the ——!" said one of the men with him.

"Come on, Andrew!" said the other. "It's time to be orf. I'm goin'."

"You cowards!" shouted Roy. "You rotten cowards!"

He was out of the shell crater on to the broken ground in an instant.

"Come back!"

"You go to ——!" snarled one of the men.

"An' make 'aste back, or you'll be killed."

And, his breath coming in deep sobs, Roy knew as he followed that his men, B Company, were running, broken, an undisciplined mob, unable to stand their ground and fight like soldiers.

The clatter of machine guns broke in on his right. He glanced over his shoulder and stumbled on. A stand was being made somewhere, even if B Company had broken.

"There ain't no 'urry, o' course." The voice seemed to come from beneath his feet. "An' you ain't made o' glass, are yer?"

Roy stood on the brink of the support trench, staring down into a machine gun emplacement at a Vickers gun and its crew.

He jumped down.

"Thanks," said one of the men dryly. "Give it 'em, ol' gel!" And the muzzle of the gun began to pour out its stream of bullets.

Roy moved on around the traverse into the next bay. Hutchinson was firing over the parapet. A dead man sprawled on the trench boards. Kempton sat on the fire-step, his rifle between his knees, sullen gloom in his face.

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"You —— cowards!" growled Roy. "Get up on the fire-step, can't you! You curs! If you don't ——"

"Give's a chance," said Kempton. "Give us a ——"

Roy caught him by the throat.

"Get up! You understand!"

"Aw' right! Lemme be!"

The boy scrambled on to the fire-step, white and shaking.

"You, too," shouted Roy.

"We stopped 'em," said Hutchinson. "But—they're a-comin' again, they are. Millions!"

In the next fire-bay, split by shell fire into a succession of wide craters, were more men of B Company, to all appearance useless for further fighting. One was piling up sandbags on the parapet, listlessly; one bound his field dressing around his wrist; another groped in the débris at his feet; Kearney leaned against the counterscarp of the trench, fumbling at the bolt of his rifle.

The subaltern's rage flared into a wild fury.

"What the —— are you doing?" he snapped. "Don't you know the Germans are coming? Kearney, what do you think you're doing?"

Kearney turned on him savagely, his dark face red with passion.

"Oh, for Gawd's sake, dry up, man! Haven't you any —— sense?"

The retort died on Roy's lips. Had not Kearney but a few short minutes before called him a coward? And now. . . .

"Becorse we're not shoutin', it don't mean we won't fight," said the man with the wounded head. "Do you want any more sandbags, Joe?"

"Come on up! They're near enough now. 'Ark, at 'em bombin' the communication trenches!"

The men lined what was left of the parapet and began to fire as fast as their fingers could press the triggers and work the bolt levers of their rifles.

"Mr. Blair," said Kearney over his shoulder, "you're the kind of orf'cer we don't often meet, thank Gawd! If they was all like you, I'd rather be killed at once an' have done with it than fire another bloomin' shot. An' that's the truth."

Roy, feeling more helpless and humiliated than he had ever believed a man could feel, stared at him and said nothing. All his authority, his power of command, had left him, when it was most needed.

THE Germans were very near now, within fifty yards. Great gaps were mowed in their ranks, but they still came on steadily in large clusters of men. Roy, standing by Kearney's side on the fire-step, feared the worst. The men had not yet recovered from the battering they had received. The attack had been too swift, delivered in too strong a force to be smashed back, the defenders were too few. Would the line hold? He doubted it. The Germans would get through and then. . . .

His thoughts broke.

"They're on us!" he yelled. "Look out!"

He fired, and a huge German came crashing down on top of him, grunting like a pole-axed ox, and clawing wildly.

Roy shoved the man to one side and stood up. There was a wild scurry of hand-to-hand fighting in the trench, some grim and bloody work with butt and bayonet, then suddenly, unexpectedly to those holding the trench, the survivors of the attacking force were making back the way they had come, through the shell.

Roy drew a deep breath and turned. In the section of trench before him were the bodies of four Germans and three British, sprawling in the chalk with gray faces and twisted limbs. A wounded man was sobbing to himself. Overhead the air was full of the hoarse scream of shells from the British guns behind the trenches. The old British front line trench, now held by the enemy, was hidden in white smoke clouds and masses of earth flung upward.

"They're gettin' theirs," said one of the men. "An' I s'pose we got to retake it. My Gawd! Look at it!"

The shriek of a monster shell approaching made them duck and cling to the sides of the broken trench; it burst with a deafening roar, covering the men with an avalanche of earth and stones.

"Steady!" said Roy nervously. "Steady! We've got to beat 'em, remember!"

"My Heaven! You're like a bloomin' gramophone," growled Kearney. "Do yer think we're here for the fun of it?"

Shell followed shell in quick succession, heavy high explosives, 5.9's and 8-inch, until the very earth heaved and shook as though in torment.

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Sick at heart, Roy wondered in dull amazement how it was he still lived.

And then, through the heavy acrid smoke, he saw Ellis, without his helmet, a red gash in his forehead, his eyes bloodshot, his uniform torn and white with chalk.

"Blair." He dropped by his side and stared out over the edge of the broken trench. "Listen to me. The guns are hard at it now, and in ——"

He broke off and seemed lost in thought.

"Yes, sir," said Roy. "The German guns?"

"No—ours. See that! And that! They'll lift presently and put a barrage further on, and we've got to retake the Loop. At all costs—you understand."

Their eyes met. Roy nodded.

"Are they sending reinforcements?"

"Dunno'. The wires are all to blazes. The C. O.'s killed, so's the second-in-command. But Mackworth had word from the brigade during the bombardment that if the Loop were taken we'd have to retake it at all costs. And a message came up by runner just now about it. Mackworth was wounded as I was speaking to him, and I'm in command. See! As soon as the guns lift, over we go. Your watch all right? Good! You'll go over in ten minutes' time, then—to the second.

"A Company's badly cut up. You'll take what's left of B. C and D are fairly all right. They're going over, too. Understand! God knows how many officers we've lost. Carstairs is killed. So are Grogan and Trenary. So's Collins. So's Edwards. Get your men across somehow, old chap, won't you? They're shaken, but they'll follow you anywhere. We've got to retake the Loop. We lost it, and it's ours to get back."

"We'll do it," said Roy.

And at that moment he had no doubts at all. Fail! His men fail! How could they?

"I'm proud of you, Blair. You've done good work today; —— good work."

Roy, strangely abashed, shook his head. "No, sir. I've not. I—I didn't stick to the Loop as I ought to have done. I went with the others."

THERE was a sudden sharp *s-swish*, the crash of an exploding *whizz-bang* and Ellis pitched forward on to his face.

Roy bent over him.

"Ellis," he said. "Ellis!"

One look was sufficient. Ellis was dead.

Roy stood up shakily. And Ellis had said that they must take back the Loop. Whatever else might happen, the Loop must be recovered from the Germans.

He glanced at his watch, then leaving the dead man in his corner he clambered along the trench to warn the soldiers crouching in the shattered fire-bays what was expected of them.

"You're going over in a few minutes now to retake the Loop. When the guns lift, I want all the N. C. O.'s that are left to bring their men on as hard as they can. We'll go in one wave, bombers and Lewis gunners on the right."

He issued his instructions quickly, pausing only so long as was necessary to see that those instructions were understood. That his men would recapture the Loop he felt certain. Nothing could stop them now. They had recovered from the panic that had made them run. Never again would their discipline fail them; not that discipline in which he himself had grounded them, day by day, month by month.

Had he shown himself weak in the past, easily swayed by the opinions of others, he might have doubted, but now these men would follow him across the open, to their deaths maybe, without a murmur. His spirits rose in exultation at the thought. Pride of race ran high within him.

He stood in the same fire-bay with Kearney, Hutchinson, Kempton and five others, all men of his own platoon.

His watch told him it was nearly time.

"Are you ready?"

No one answered him, and he gazed across the open ground, dotted with dead and dying toward the Loop, still shrouded in the smoke of bursting shells.

Suddenly, although the rolling of the guns had not diminished, the smoke clouds began to thin and drift away from the shattered chalk mounds opposite.

And Roy knew that the time had come. The guns had lifted and were crashing their shells on to the German trenches behind the Loop. He put his whistle to his lips and the shrill warning rang out.

"Now then, B Company, over you go." Rifle in hand he scrambled out of the trench into the open. "Come on, B! As hard as you can."

He raced forward and then, a cold terror

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gripped his heart; he turned and found himself alone. Surely they had understood! On the right four or five men, all that had left the trench, were scrambling hastily back to cover. Almost stifled by the fierce beating of his heart, Roy followed them.

"For God's sake!" he said thickly. "What is it? Didn't you hear? Don't you know we ought to be charging?"

From the left the crackle of machine gun fire and the banging of bombs told him that C and D Companies were pushing home their attack on the new cut.

"You get down out of it," said some one in a surly tone. "Or you'll be gettin' killed."

"A —— good job if 'e does."

Roy ran along the edge of the broken trench.

"You!" he said. "You—Kearney, what the ——'s up with you? Hutchinson—don't you understand? C and D went over, and we—we've not gone with them."

Bullets were whistling past him, some fifty or so yards behind his back a shell burst and the débris of earth and chalk spattered his head and shoulders.

"Don't you men know we ought to be in the Loop?" he asked. "Didn't you hear me giving the word to go over?"

"We heard," said Kearney.

"Good God, then! What's wrong with you? Are you afraid of being killed—or what?"

"We're not," said Kearney.

"Then why the —— don't you do as you're told?"

"Becorse we don't bloody well choose to," said Kearney.

Unbelieving, Roy slid into the trench. A wild anger seized him.

"What's that you're saying?" By God! if you speak like that I'll——"

"Dry up!" said Hutchinson. "An' put that rifle down. Orf'cer or no orf'cer, you don't play that kind o' game with me."

As in some nightmare, Roy gazed at the hard, grim faces of his men, and read therein hatred and contempt and even mirth. A dull despair took possession of him; a wish to escape somehow and hide his shame and if needs be, die.

"You curs," he choked. "You miserable curs. You're afraid—afraid to follow me."

"Afraid!" Kearney was sneering at him. "We're not afraid, but we won't go with you, Mr. Blair. Go on by yourself, if yer wants to. What right have you to lead men? You've proved yourself unfit to be an orf'cer from first to last. An' we're not goin' with yer, not one of us, not even if yer was to go down on yer knees an' ask us."

Roy shivered. Words of hot anger died away from his lips. Had he given his best for this? To be spurned like a dog, laughed at by the men who should have followed him to the death! And what remained? Ruin and disgrace. His men had refused to follow him. Never while life lasted would the memory of this shame be wiped out. He felt helpless, deserted, forlorn. He had despised them as far beneath him, as creatures of a lower order of intelligence; yet now, he would have given all that he possessed to have held their friendship.

And then he saw Stirk coming toward him around the traverse at the far end of the fire-bay.

"Blair," he called. "Blair, what is it? Where's Ellis? Didn't you know B Company was to get back the Loop?"

"Ellis is dead," said Roy. "He told me before he was killed what to do."

"Then, why in God's name haven't you done it? Why haven't you taken your men across while the barrage was helping you? C and D have taken the new cut and the Germans are still in the Loop. What's it all mean?"

"Mean!" Roy laughed harshly. "Mean! Well, Stirk, it means the men won't follow me. Not one of 'em. I went out by myself and they stayed here, in the trench."

Stirk's face was very stern.

"Won't follow you! Is that it?" A curious pity came into his eyes. "My God!"

"They said they wouldn't—" said Roy, bitterly. "Simple, isn't it? You'd better take 'em, Stirk; you're a better man than I am; maybe they'll go with you."

"You fellows know we've got to get back the Loop, don't you?"

"Yes," said Kearney. "What's more, we can do it."

"Will you come with me?"

"Yes," said Kearney. "My Gawd! Yes." He looked at the others. "Get ready, you chaps! You, Smith; you, Kempton, tell 'em in the other fire-bays. Pass the word on we're goin' over with Mr. Stirk."

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And without moving, still feeling in a dull way that he was in a dream or trance, Roy stood aside and waited. Stirk was speaking to him, telling him he was sorry or something, he didn't know, nor did he care. It didn't matter now; nothing mattered. He was glad when he heard the whistle and Stirk's shout: "Come on! Over, the crowd of you," and saw the men, *his* men, the men who should have been following him, scramble over the parapet at Stirk's heels. It came over him with a fresh shock that his face was wet with tears. Why? Had he been crying?

This was the end. The end of everything that made life possible. He was alone, deserted by all, save only the dead. And what was left, since life had proved impossible? Death—no more, no less.

HE CLAMBERED out of the trench and walked slowly and deliberately across the open through the storm of bullets that whistled by. And as he watched the khaki figures racing toward the Loop a feeling of pride thrilled him.

Nothing that they were asked to do would be impossible. They could not fail. It was only himself—R. C. Blair—who had failed.

He was near the Loop now where they were fighting hand to hand, and the wicked stuttering of machine guns rose high above all other sounds. A bullet struck him on the elbow. He reeled and laughed. With better luck his troubles would have been over.

There were dead men on either side, British and German, poor corpses that had once been men. He glanced at them with envy in his heart. They were the fortunate ones. He stumbled on, gripping his elbow tightly, praying for death.

Through the swirling smoke came Hutchinson, gray-faced and bleeding. Roy put out his sound arm and clutched him.

"What is it? What's wrong?" he shouted. "What are you doing here?"

"Lemme alone—I'm done for." He spoke thickly through swollen lips. "Machine gun—in the Loop—they're holdin' us up—killin' us off——"

Hutchinson tore himself loose, and Roy went forward once more through twisted wire and broken stakes toward the Loop where . . . What was it Hutchinson had said? There were machine guns and men were dying. Perhaps it was in the Loop that he also would be killed! Other men were being killed . . . Why not he?

His head drooped forward, his legs bent under his weight, his arm burned as though on fire. Dimly he saw, all blurred and faded, men in khaki, men of his own company, lying scattered in the midst of crumbled hills of chalk, some dead, others still living firing their rifles with fierce haste. Even as he watched, one rose to his knees and fell back dead. Roy wondered if he, too, would die as easily.

Some one was shouting his name—the voice resembled Kearney's.

"Get down—get down at once, you blinkin' fool!"

He staggered on across the wastes of chalk.

"They'll see yer—Mr. Blair, come back——"

From somewhere very close at hand he heard the angry *tut-tut-tut-tut-tut-tut-tut-tut-tut-tut-tut-tut* of a machine gun.

And then there flashed into his mind the memory of what Hutchinson had said. This was the machine gun. Here were the Germans killing his men—holding back their advance. *He* would die, of course—it was his right—but might he not save the lives of others in so doing? He had been useless enough, God only knew how useless. . . It would make things better, perhaps, if he could do one good act before he died. . . .

He halted and glanced eagerly from side to side, smiling a little, as one who knows what happiness awaits him.

Directly in front of where he stood were masses of chalk thrown up by high explosive, a litter of barbed wire and broken stakes and torn sandbags. Under cover of this barrier, hidden from view, was the machine gun. At his feet lay a dead sergeant with his rifle still gripped in his hands. By the sergeant's side was an unexploded bomb, the pin still holding down the lever.

Roy stooped suddenly and picked up the bomb. He drew out the pin and with his fingers pressing down the lever began to climb the short, uneven slope of chalk.

Some one was shouting his name again. He shook his head impatiently and swore under his breath. There was nothing that could stop him now. Nothing at all. He

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had work to do, work of much importance, work that he alone could manage.

At the top of the slope he halted once more, and his heart missed a beat or so and then went thumping madly on.

Beneath him in a shell crater were three Germans with the machine gun firing from between great lumps of chalk. Their backs were turned and as he watched them crouching in their hollow, he wondered which would be the first to see him.

He slackened his grip on the bomb, the lever flew off and the striker shot home. The fuse began to burn.

Roy laughed harshly.

"Say your prayers, —— you!" he said. "You've just five seconds left."

"Mr. Blair," shouted the voice. "Get down!"

Footsteps scrunched on the chalk behind his back.

One of the Germans, a stout, pale man with flat nostrils, clutched at his rifle.

"No, you don't," said Roy, and threw his bomb.

The ground rose under him, and everything, the blue of the sky, the leafless trees in the distance, the trenches, the white chalk and the dead bodies, all faded into nothingness.

ROY opened his eyes to find himself lying huddled up in a crater. For a time he lay without moving, staring about him incuriously, conscious only of pain, until gradually, bit by bit, he remembered all that had happened, and a flood of misery surged over him.

"Oh, God Almighty!"

"I thought you'd gone——"

Kearney, very white and still, his black hair matted on his forehead, was gazing at him from tired, sunken eyes.

"Both of us, again, eh?" he continued. "Funny, ain't it?"

He tried to laugh, but the laugh broke in a sob.

"Does it hurt?" said Roy, raising himself on one elbow.

"It hurts like hell," said the private. "I didn't know as anything could hurt so hellish much."

"Kearney," said the officer, "we're both pretty far gone by the looks of things, and I don't care, myself, how soon it comes. I've nothing to live for. I've been a fool and worse all through; a cur, a—a —— cur——"

An expression of unbelief had crept into Kearney's face.

"I—I never knew what I was till—till you fellows refused to follow me. Then I understood. I—I hope you won't think too badly of me, Kearney. I've got a lot on my conscience just at present, and it—it hurts worse than—why, the wounds—they're nothing. And you—you won't believe it, of course—why should you? But, I've tried my hardest all through to do what was right.

"I thought the only way to be an officer was to—to be harsh. And when Sharkie was killed—I'd rather have been killed myself. It seems a lie, but it's the truth. I knew he was a friend of yours, Kearney—and I'm sorry—more sorry than I can say for all I've done."

Kearney did not speak and Roy, after a long silence, sank back helplessly, certain at last that nothing he could say or do would make things easier. He was an outcast, to be despised henceforth by all, living when by right he should be dead—for he would not die. Such fortune, he knew, was not for him. His punishment was life.

The roar of the guns persisted, at times shells would burst close by, once a nose cap whirred into the chalk of the crater, the day grew hotter. Roy, racked by pain, his throat parched with thirst, prayed for death, prayed as he had never thought men could pray for anything.

"Oh, God, why can't I be killed? Why can't I be killed?"

"What for?" said Kearney in a weak voice.

"Because I'm no good," he answered fiercely. "Because I treated you so rottenly. Because you wouldn't follow me. Because—oh God, because it's too late."

"Why's it too late? You ain't all bad. You said you was sorry—*you*—I never expected that—never. It's more'n most fellers would have had the pluck to own. An' do you know wot it meant to us—when yer went an' knocked out that machine gun? We was bein' killed like rats in a trap. The company—wot's left of 'em—would do anythin' for yer after that—any mortal thing you'd ask 'em."

Roy listened in dull amazement.

"What!" he said, faintly. "You mean there'd be hope for me, if I came out alive?"

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"Hope!" said Kearney. "Why not? You ain't goin' to peg out now, are yer? I shouldn't. Things 'ud never be like they was. Why, next time we'd foller you to hell an' back."

And at that Roy felt hot tears trickling down his burned and aching cheeks. Kearney, the man who hated him—and with cause—had said this!

"Did you come after me?" he asked presently. "I heard——"

"Some one had to," said Kearney. "We thought you were lookin' for us—until you threw the bomb."

"How did I come to be in this crater? Did you drag me here?"

"Maybe I did," said Kearney wearily. "My Gawd, but I'm tired!"

Two dirty, smoke-grimed stretcher-bearers slid into the shell hole.

" 'Ullo, a couple of 'em here. An orf'cer, too."

One of them bent over Roy and whistled softly between his teeth.

"Arm—side—both legs. You'll need to see the doctor, sir, just as quick as we can get yer there. Take a swig o' this—gently." He looked over his shoulder "How's your man, Jim? *Bad!* 'E ain't near as bad as this. Clap that shell dressin' on an' let's be movin' quick. We won't try an' do any patchin' 'ere—too big a job."

"What are you talking about?" asked Roy suddenly. "You're not thinking of taking me first, are you?"

"Yes, sir, at once. Those wounds o' yours oughter be seen to. An' if we leave yer now, p'r'aps it 'ull be hours before we can reach yer again."

"Right!" said Roy. "Then you'll take him! Understand! He's worse than I am, and he's done a —— sight more than I'm ever likely to do. I suppose you think because I'm an officer I can't wait?"

The two stretcher-bearers stared at him in a puzzled fashion.

"Didn't you hear me?" he said.

"The fightin' ain't over yet, sir, an' maybe the Germans 'ull be attackin' again. If they does——"

"All the more reason for you to hurry him off now. I'm not going till he's safe, anyhow, not if you wait here for a month. Kearney, you're for Blighty—and I hope to God I'm lucky enough to meet you there. I've not had a chance yet to tell you everything that I wanted to."

When the stretcher-bearers had climbed out of the crater with their burden, Roy settled himself down to wait patiently for what the day might bring.

The pain of his wounds was maddening, flies tormented him, nor had he the strength to drive them off, the sun scorched down pitilessly from a brazen sky, his head ached with the thunder of the guns, he felt sick and weak from loss of blood; and yet, in spite of all, a strange happiness held him. He had done wrong and he had paid the price in shame and suffering, but he had learned his lesson and—he had Kearney's word for it—there was hope.

THE MOUNTED

BY WALTER M. MANNING

FROM the line to the land of the frozen sun,
Where the lights flash overhead,
Their motto is graven with fist and gun:
"Go get 'em! Alive or dead."

Though the trail be long, and the quarry strong,
When the final word is said
If you bet on the Mounted you're never wrong.
They get 'em, alive or dead.

Through cold and heat, through storm and sleet
The long chase may be led;
But at last the "wanted" and Mounted meet,
And they get 'em, alive or dead.

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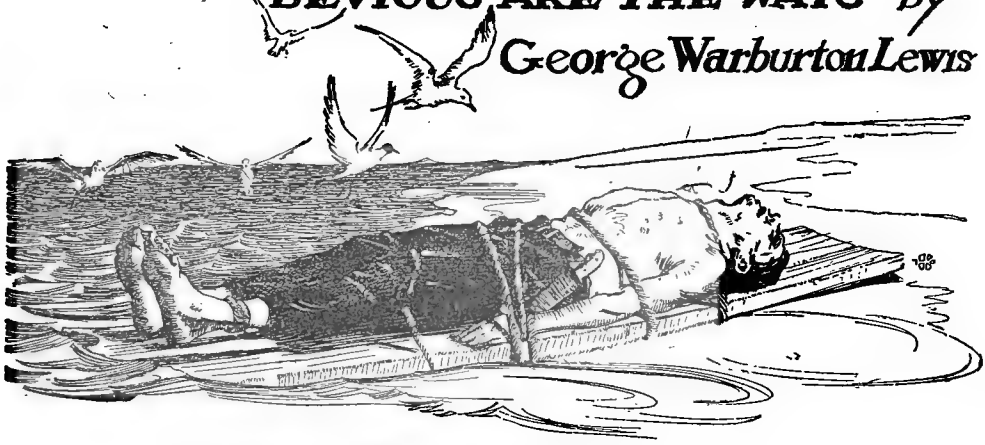
DEVIOUS ARE THE WAYS by George Warburton Lewis



Author of "Trailing the Jungle Man," and "Wine of the Wilderness."

FROM the bowels of the forecastle, with deep concern crimping his bronzed brows, came Tankersley, soldier of fortune, tropical tramp, and galley helper aboard the *Pez Volador*. Came Tankersley from the depths of the pest-ridden forecastle to announce that two more seamen had succumbed.

Though it was ten o'clock in the morning, the captain was not appreciably drunker than usual; nor was he noticeably less drunk than it was his wont to be. He was an exponent of the happy medium. Among his own ilk he had sometimes been envied the cleverness with which he gaged the potations that kept alive in him the smoldering fire of intoxication.

Of a rich, walnut-stain color was the captain's unprepossessing face; nor had tropical suns played any part with nature in its coloring. His Indian ancestry showed in the knobby cheek-bones and his mouth was thin-lipped and wide, with a pronounced bestial droop at the corners. His eyes were round, and the green-black iris seemed to have all but crowded out the thin rim of white. If other noteworthy features there were, a horsetail beard that straggled from cheek to chin did their owner a manifest kindness in concealing them.

The captain was one of those gipsies of the deep who are born a few decades too late to ply successfully the piratical calling for which Nature fashions them, though the innate proclivities of the pirate, the inclination to dark and desperate deeds, still occasionally crop out in proof of the well-known old maxim that "blood will tell."

The Norwegian mate, Jornsen, sat with the captain in the latter's cabin. On a table between them were demijohn and glasses and they were tipsily intoning a Mexican love-song. When a voice from the door broke in upon their lurid *cancion*, abrupt anger drove the flush of liquor from the pirate skipper's face.

"Two more done for, sir," reported Tankersley, mechanically saluting, "and another Chilean sailor just gone into spasms."

The captain drained his glass leisurely and rose, facing the galley man in an attitude that was all of menace. His piercing, green-black eyes sought and held his informant's blue ones. The blue ones, it might have been observed, were large beyond all proportion. They were always so very wide open, the captain had often remarked, that they gave their owner a fawn-like, half-scared expression.

"Meester Tank, tdhees ees tdhe second taime tdhat you haiv meestake yourr duty een tdhis sheep, wherre I am *maestro*. Eef tdhe whole crrew ees die eet ees not yourr beesness. You haiv make to talk een wheespers tdhe men een tdhees sheep. I haiv eengage you een Rio Janeiro forr my galley. You haiv forgeet yourr poseetion.

"Leesten! Eet ees on tdhe high seas. Tdhees sheep ees my keengdom—tdhees cabin ees my thrrone. Tdhere weel be no muteeny een my sheep, Meester Tank. Eef you waggle again yourr tongue to wheesper muteeny, I weel make tdhe eexamplee of you forr tdhe crrew—I haiv tdhe

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right! *Perro!*" he screamed in sudden excess of rage, smashing his glass to fragments on the table, "I weel coot out yourr wheespering tongue!"

The Chilean sailor was dead at noon, and the body was at once lowered over the side. The event gladdened three great sharks that had appeared simultaneously with the event and now lolled lazily in the schooner's wake.

In the afternoon the good-natured little Venezuelan doctor, roughing it for his health, who for five days had perhaps been the busiest man of medicine in all Christendom, was himself seized. At the first dread inkling of the monster's claws in his system, he bolted every remedy he could lay his shaking hands upon, while his face assumed the splotchy, gray mask of fear.

His terror-glazed eyes wandered unceasingly about the ship in a pathetic, animal-like stare, mutely petitioning relief from the uncombatable thing that gripped and tore his vitals. It was then that the wide eyes of Tankersley saw light through a labyrinth of perilous measures. He plunged into an absorbing study of bacteria and germ life under the uncertain guidance of the doomed doctor.

The galley man was not a stranger to the subtle, insidious agent of destruction that had stolen into the forecastle and sown its loathsome seed in the fertile filth that was native there. With a Brazilian gold-piece the scullery-helper bribed the cook to silence, and all through the shriveling heat of the afternoon, while the schooner plowed a scallopy, oil-surfaced sea and its captain lay in a death of drunken slumber, his lean figure crooked studiously over the ship's medicine-chest, beside which the little *medico* from Caracas slowly writhed out his life.

The end was the same. The cramped and riven body of the little doctor went down into the slimy sea with the magnified, blood-red disc of the sun, the look of despairing appeal frozen in his unclosed eyes and his features braided into grotesque and awful distortions.

LOW down on the northeast rim of the horizon lay a long, green-hued bank of cloud, over which agile snakes of electricity shot in wriggling flight at intervals and disappeared. Maybe there was a storm somewhere over there. But one of the *Pez Volador's* crew took note of that innocuous-looking bank of massed vapor.

He was an average tramping Englishman who answered to the name of Nicholson, and who, being half a sailor, though still a beardless youth of twenty, had somehow achieved a boatswain's berth among the schooner's complement of pick-ups. The boatswain gazed long at the mysterious cloud-bank over the port rail. He gazed until memories of bonny England, his own abandoned England, rebuked his wayward course—until figmentary ebon devils grimaced at and reproached him out of the swift darkness that had fallen like a pall around the idling ship.

At length he gave a great start, and breaking from the mizmaze of his reverie, he swung forward, a second later to pause and listen as the crackle of excited and angry voices reached him from the direction of the starboard cabins aft. He crossed to starboard and slipped abaft without sound. In the doorway of the dead doctor's cabin he beheld the stranded American who he remembered had shipped as galley-helper at Rio de Janeiro.

But no clew to his lowly rating hung about him now. A submissive, world-beaten man before, he stood there now, recreated, transformed, two inches taller, the Englishman could have sworn. He was rather good to look at, the boatswain thought, but he was denouncing the master of the ship, and for that reason was a master fool, if not a suicide. The Englishman knew the captain, and the easily foreseen outcome of this clash chilled him like the fog of his London Winter.

"No, Meester Tank, I weel not poot eento quarranteene at Colon. Tdhees carrgo ees going off before tdhe quarranteene comes on—close by Nueva Orleans. Eef you wish for go to Colon, I send you tdhere—I weel send you queeck! *Comprende?*"

The drooping corners of the captain's mouth drew down to dim vertical lines under his thin beard, and his queer eyes lighted with something that was darker and deeper than drunken hate. Some of the crew had edged toward the promise of blood, for the varnish-colored captain, they well knew, had put rebellious seamen to the knife with his own gorilla-like hands.

It was the captain's chance to impress the crew with his prowess, and, though

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brimming drunk, the truth of the psychological moment flashed upon him.

"Eef you open again yourr leeps to wheesper muteeny to tdhese men, Meester Tank, I weel coot out yourr beesy tongue!"

Tankersley's thin figure moved clear of the cabin and stood rigid. Another being, in truth, than the scullery helper looked out from the sky-blue eyes, and a spirit long years dormant rose in revolt.

"When you talk about sending me to Colon," he said, with strange composure, "I listen. I'm willing and glad, God knows —I'd go in a skiff! But when you threaten me with what you'll do—you're crazy, man; you're plumb *loco!* I've got you figured out anyhow," he concluded desperately, "as a mongrel four-flusher! *Comprende?*"

It was a bald and galling affront thrown in the teeth of the master of a ship in the presence of his crew. But the captain moved not a muscle. His green-black eyes dropped and clung to the deck, and he hesitated there in silence as though weighing an intricate problem.

"So you weesh for go to Colon een a *skeef*, ees eet, Meester Tank?"

The captain raised his eyes quizzically, but Tankersley kept silence.

"Well, tdhen eet weel be so."

He spoke with calm decision. His air was one of finality.

"I weel geeve you clearrance to eight bells. You shall haiv tdhe skeef!"

The captain retired in the direction of his respited demijohn, but the galley man did not retire. He advanced and grinned malevolently for a moment upon the crew, still lingering. He knew these men. He knew the thing that was at their hearts—the faltering, inchoate creature of human will that cowered in the shadows of their doubts, throttled by a vast fear—not fear of the pale and awful finger that went on from day to day touching its victims at random; but fear of one man's despotic power, of the revolvers in the cabin, and the yardarm.

The diversity of race and individual interest disfavored organization. Their cringing hearts told them that it was better to die slowly, painfully, than to be slaughtered on deck for mutiny and thrown overboard. Withal, they were glad they had allowed the American to dig his own grave, nor did they treat with great anxiety the contingency of bridges blazing behind them.

The galley man was very pale when he spoke to the mob.

"You will gradually die off, all of you," he said quietly. "It's no more than you deserve, only I kind o' hate to stand by and watch human beings sicken and die like rats. I had hoped to save a few of you, either with the ship's medicine or by quarantine—but it's all off now. The captain has threatened me with a small boat—a skiff—you know what that means in the Caribbean."

He hesitated a moment, gazing meditatively out to sea, then concluded—

"I only want to say to you fellows before I go," and his voice rose with all the pent-up emotion of his being, "that from your greaser captain clear down to the last nigger flunky in the fo'c's'le, you're a pack of mongrel, baby-hearted, white-livered curs!"

The galley man's denunciation swept through the *Pez Volador's* pest-ridden shell like a blighting breath. The crew fell back dismayed before the wonder of his wrath. Himself, he had immediately a vague consciousness of a mighty obligation discharged, of a crushing weight lifted from his trammeled spirit; and when he inhaled a deep breath, the oxygen of the Caribbean had never before seemed so exhilarating and sweet in his heaving lungs.

The thing was done.

In the forecastle the galley man met the English boatswain, who scribbled on a scrap of paper that he and five others would fight if the worst came. After all, thought the American, maybe there was something in the much harped-on consistency of blood.

EIGHT bells clanged forward and the ship's boats still hung rigid in their davits. The galley man fetched his scanty belongings from the forecastle, with a supply of fresh water and biscuit, and strode aft. He was ready. He saw the captain come out of his cabin, and was about to inquire after the promised boat, when suddenly, to his amazement, the whole ship sprang into uproar. A big man leaped from behind a coil of rope. It was the Norwegian mate.

The galley man snatched at his sheath-knife, but in the same instant the mate's bear-hug pinioned his arms to his sides like the jaws of a vise, and simultaneously the captain reached his struggling enemy with a deadening blow from a capstan-bar. The

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loyal boatswain's force flashed from the forecastle like kinetoscopic figures, and came hurdling over the obstructed deck to join in the fray. But the conspirators had prepared against emergency.

About a dozen heads bobbed up through the after hatchway and the ship's firearms began spurting flame right in the faces of the mutineers, toppling over half their number at the first volley. The captain's blow was driven with experienced skill. It fell with nicety where it was aimed. The world quivered into a white-hot flame of dazzling light before the galley man's eyes and his brain reeled and plunged into darkness.

There was a great warped plank aboard, and there was an abundance of rope, while a stoker's bar swung beneath the plank would keep the concave side up.

Everything favored the fulfilment of the captain's promise of a boat—a skiff. The deed there on the deck of the pest-ship came out of a brain fired with liquor, but it was nevertheless a deed barbarous and horrible.

One beaten mutineer, lying full-ironed on the red-stained deck, blasphemed and prayed alternately—prayed to be heard by the mighty king that ruled his own far-off homeland—prayed deliriously for battleships and justice.

THE inrunning tide of the Caribbean had deposited a strange object on the Isthmian coast—the body of a man, rope-lashed, face up, to a warped plank. The curious craft drifted ashore on the gentle swells of a Summer sea one afternoon and was left high and dry on a sunbathed beach of coral, where it lay aloof from life, and surrounded by silence and mystery.

If the man still lived he was unconscious, and he was but the ghastly caricature of a human being. The trunk was bare and wasted; the scalding sun had peeled the skin from the exposed body in brown, ragged patches and left the second epidermis a livid pink.

The mottled features were drawn as from intense suffering, and the effect was a hideous, clownish grin. In the edge of the scalp was the long blue seam of a wound that the salt water apparently had purged of its blood. Canvas trousers encased the shrunken legs and a leathern belt at the waist held a sailor's sheath-knife.

Plank and man rested on what resembled the ruined chimneys of a miniature coral city; and the inquisitive westering sun pried the man's glued eyelids in vain and drove his fiery shafts into flesh that sensed no hurt.

After a while a giant *tortuga* labored his slow way out of the sea and tentatively nosed an alien foot, whose invasion here seemed to mystify him immeasurably. His curiosity seemingly sated, he dragged his oval bulk lazily away to a near-by basking-ground of warm sand.

But for the barely audible *lap lap* of the surf, it was a world of silence, brooding and interminable.

At sundown a gush of cool wind came out of the northeast and a great billow of inky cloud rolled across the heated heavens. The wind rose steadily to a gale that smote the Caribbean into lashing and tumbling mountains of froth-carpeted water. Then followed rain that was infinite walls of water flung earthward like sheet lead by the fury of the storm. Came on a night that was wild and wilder; a night such as carries awe to the strongest hearts that dwell in ships.

And amid this tumultuous warring of the elements the sound of a human voice rose faintly and was stifled. It rose again, a feeble, faltering wail of anguish, and again it was snatched from its fount and shattered by the storm's wrath. The chill downpour had resuscitated the sea's dire secret. The rope-lashed man was come back to clutch weakly at life.

He was vaguely conscious of a desire to live. He knew not why. No definite purpose underlay the half-formed desire. It seemed to him that he was being flayed by fiends, though he sensed no resulting pain; merely the dull throb, throb of blow after blow upon his paralyzed body. He had drifted down out of chaos to a vague world devoid of pain, yet filled with startling fantasies.

A mite of will struggled up from some hitherto dormant fiber of his being, driven by a faint glimmer of reason. He must live. He knew that much now. He got his mouth a little way open and could almost believe that cool trickles of water—sweet, fresh water—splashed gratefully on his fevered tongue. A sense of slow strangulation low in his throat caused him to gulp and swallow desperately, and almost

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immediately his grasp of the definite grew firmer.

He experimented further, and so came to know after a long time that he was in reality swallowing a sweet, refreshing liquid. He was aware that it was good to keep on gulping this wonderful elixer. And thus, at the remotest limit of life, a soul was called back to earth through the providential agency of a storm anathematized by many a buffeted seaman.

It was a colony of monster crabs that ultimately spelled salvation for the castaway. The stoker's bar, ingeniously swung beneath the plank to give it equilibrium, had become lodged in a pocket of coral, and as the rising tide rocked and worried the greaser captain's fiendish device the teeth of the coral gradually gnawed one of the imprisoning thongs in two.

And thus the man got one hand free, after which the sheath-knife, laboriously and uncertainly wielded, fought off the overbold crabs, for they had scented a feast and were ravenously eager at their discovery. It was a fateful battle; the man won it narrowly. Afterward he was glad of the fight, for the slain enemy became nourishment. From the carcasses of these repellant crawling things the man drank back his ebbed-out life.

A WEEK passed, and then one morning at daybreak a man wakened from sleep on the top of a great rock that projects from an uninhabited stretch of the Central American coast into the waters of the Caribbean. In the half-light of dawn the man sat up and blinked searchingly up and down the beach. He was always on the lookout for loitering *tortugas*. To him they represented the sum of life. Suddenly he dug his knuckles into his sleep-dulled eyes with spasmodic energy.

"Guess I've got 'em," he remarked to himself.

He looked again, and now his look became a stare of amazement partaking of unbelief. What he saw was a dismantled ship aground on the rock-lined beach. The wreck lay about half a mile distant and aboard her there was no movement, no sign of life. She rested on her keel, parallel with the beach, listing heavily inshore—a tattered and forlorn memorial of the ravages of the recent storm.

Long and critically the man studied the wreck. Then, abruptly, he found his voice.

"My God!" he broke out in wild excitement, "it's her!"

His eyes were round with the wonder of his discovery. The blood had suddenly died out of his tanned face. Half clambering, half falling in his great haste, he descended from his lofty sleeping-place and made off at a run toward the wreck.

His body to the waist was dingy brown and bare; the flesh was terribly shrunken and had a blotchy, desiccated look. Abreast of the wreck the man splashed out into the water until the salt wavelets touched his lips; then he swam until he could read the brass lettering under the schooner's bows—*Pez Volador*. Labeling so dismal a wreck, the rollicking appellation, *Flying Fish*, seemed to the man to carry now a mocking innuendo of sarcasm.

A tangled mass of wreckage, anchored somewhere amidships, hung over the ship's battered side to the water's edge—a gangplank wrought in the workshop of the tempest and facilitating ascent to the deck. Once aboard, the man noted regretfully that all the life-boats were missing. Carried away by the storm, he conjectured, or maybe the crew had taken to the sea in them. Of a sudden he recoiled, strangely thrilled. Staring up at him from the deck were the vacant, wide-open eyes of a corpse.

"The storm!" he mused aloud, when he recovered his composure.

He backed away from the thing lying mangled among the débris and began threading his way aft; but chancing to glance up just then he halted abruptly with one foot poised in air and involuntarily his hand dropped to his sheath-knife. He could have sworn that the flitting figure of a man had just disappeared behind the little cluster of half demolished cabins a few yards in front of him. It might be his old enemy!

A rapid search, however, proved his hitherto excellent eyesight at fault. It was indeed strange, but he put the incident out of his mind and wandered on over the storm-littered deck. A yellow-skinned seaman lay lifeless on a bare spot which, to all appearances, had but lately been cleared of the storm's clutter! The horrible grinning and twisted features bore mute testimony of an abiding scourge in a dead ship. The man shook his head sadly.

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"Cholera—more cholera!" he murmured, moving on aft.

He was thinking now of his own providential escape from the dread germ, of the medicine chest and of the captain; and of the latter's monstrously fulfilled promise of a skiff! How had he ever endured that long agony? His mind dropped back and back until he saw again the inhuman designer of all his torture, and as retrospect led him once more along the horrific ways of his suffering his bosom heaved and the nails of his gripping fingers dug into his shriveled palms like knife-blades.

After a weary week he had won back some of his lost vitality. Raw turtle meat had given him strength, and with the return of normal physical life had come a soul-consuming yearning for vengeance. He prayed now with all his heart that the storm had not cheated him.

The crew he found aboard to a man, with the exception of Nicholson, the English boatswain, and like the ghastly carcass of the ship herself, they were all dead, just as the galley man had told them they would be. He hoped the loyal Englishman had contrived to get away in one of the missing life-boats.

A faint sound within the captain's cabin caused the galley man to approach it with caution. His sheath-knife, whetted on the smooth coral of the beach to a keen edge, was in his hand. The door stood ajar. He peered in. Sprawling forward across the table on his face was the cramped and squirming figure of a swart man. Though his features were twisted with pain, there was no mistaking his identity. It was the greaser captain!

The galley man flung the door wide. Huddled on the floor lay the quiescent and rigid form of Jornsen, the mate. Drawn were his features, too, like those of the other dead, into a pallid mask of pain and terror. The thing knew no discrimination. The Norwegian who had ruled the ship by fear, by force of his devil's personality, had passed out in quite the same hideous way as had the human beasts whom he had driven with blows.

The cabin door crashed open with a force that tore it from its hinges, but the man writhing on the table heard no sound. A rope of yellowish froth was crawling from between his thin, cruel lips and his dark face was incredibly seamed and knotted by the swift poison of the death-germ. The galley man took in these details when, in a transport of passion, he had gripped and flung his stricken foe headlong against the splintered wall of the cabin.

Then he checked himself with a grim smile. He would be fair. He would take no advantage even of him. The horror of being paid in kind came to the captain now and almost dominated his agony. His clenched jaws relaxed and fell apart in ghastly fashion. He believed he knew that the white, impassive face that stayed there haunting him all these moons was the spirit-face of a murdered man.

His terror transcended even that of imminent death when the potential ghost spoke —spoke in the same tense voice that had foretold the fate of the cowed crew. The spirit that had risen from the sea told the sick man that it had come to purge him of his malady, so that it might have the exquisite joy of paring from his well body an ounce of flesh daily until the torture should be torture no longer.

It told him that Another had sent it from the Valley of the Shadow as its own avenger in order that no small detail might be overlooked, no screaming and subtle joy of vengeance denied. This done, the spirit became more practical and lugged about half the contents of the medicine-chest into the captain's cabin. It set water to boil in the galley and scalded every germ in the ship, except, perhaps, a few cached in the bedding and other inaccessible places.

Also, it grew absorbed in the mysteries of *materia medica.* It flooded the patient's inner man with potations that were like live fire, and beat vigorous tattoos on his back to revive failing respiration.

When the extraordinary spirit left the wreck for the night and went to take its repose on shore, the captain, strange to say, was not yet dead. Cholera and fright, however, were still at work on him. The things on deck with the wide-staring eyes had been given decent sea-burial, and the patient lay in a comfortable berth between clean sheets.

NEXT morning the galley man, ashore, wakened as before, and let his gaze wander up and down the beach. He was not searching for *tortugas* now, which, perhaps, explains why he presently espied one. Its great steel-colored

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disc spotted the sand opposite the wreck. The toothsome steaks, broiled in the ship's galley, would be a luxury with coffee and biscuit.

Something suddenly drew his eyes away from their object. There was something moving aboard the wreck! There was but one soul aboard that wreck, he remembered, and if that soul were moving, its course would certainly be in the direction of eternity. Again he made a precipitate descent from the rock and raced for the schooner.

He climbed up over the ship's side to the deck. There was no movement anywhere on board. He searched forward and aft, his bare feet rendering his movements noiseless, and peered into every possible hiding-place among the cabins and below deck, but discovered nothing that threw any light whatever on the moving figure which had for the second time so mysteriously disappeared.

The galley man was not superstitious, but a nameless anxiety grew upon him now. His efforts concluded with a scrutiny of the stricken skipper's cabin and an examination of the patient himself, who still lay tucked up in his berth, precisely as the galley man had left him the night before.

He suffered less pain now, but it was patent from his wild-staring eyes and grinningly distorted features that he was rapidly sinking.

"Eet ees neer tdhe feenish now," he wheezed.

His claw-like hands clutched the bed-clothing nervously, but his queer little eyes followed his attendant's movements with strange persistency. The galley man could almost conceive that those piercing orbs would continue to roll about and dog his movements even after the ravaging plague had devastated their tenement and extinguished the dwindling flame of life that still abode there.

It was clear to the galley man that the captain could not last through the night, but notwithstanding the bitterness that still rankled in his heart, it was not in him to desert even so miserable a wretch as the patient in his last hours. He prepared the berth that had been the mate's, and after looking to the final needs of his patient, himself retired and presently fell asleep.

He dreamed, oddly enough, that Nicholson, after facing starvation in a life-boat, had reached Colon.

With the rising of the tide that night a second great storm gathered and came galloping over the restless Caribbean. At first the echeloned army of breakers only rocked the helpless schooner gently, that the coral rams which had already penetrated her keel, might gore her a little deeper.

But the tide that was driven ahead of the gale that night was a tremendous storm-tide, and, by the time the tempest broke in earnest it had lifted the tattered *Pez Voladora* from an anchorage that might otherwise have been her grave, and set her afloat, a leaking derelict, in a sea even worse than that which had tossed her, crippled and maimed, upon the beach.

The galley man was awakened by the wild pitching of the hulk, which had been solidly impaled upon the coral spikes a few hours before. The lantern which he had lighted and swung from the ceiling before turning in was gyrating violently, but its flickering light was sufficient to show him that which at first defied credulity and then seemed to freeze the very blood in his veins.

The greaser captain sat on the edge of his berth, every trace of his late malady gone, and on his ungodly face a grin that was hideous with the contemplation of murder. His right hand was creeping stealthily beneath the mattress upon which he had lain and, the watcher was now sure, so successfully shammed the symptoms of the dread epidemic. He had indeed planned well.

When he withdrew his hand from beneath the mattress it held a short dagger. All this the galley man saw through half-closed lids. He knew that the flicker of an eyelash would mean a cat-like spring, a thrust and—death. His sheath-knife was at his belt, for he had removed no clothing, and toward it under the bed-clothing crept his right hand.

Almost imperceptible as was the cautious movement the keen eyes of the Mexican-Indian caught it. He sprang like a waiting panther, but he cleared scarce more than half the interval, for the galley man met him fair, and in the same instant a great sea smashed the rehung cabin door from its hinges and drove the clinched contestants against the opposite wall with stunning force.

Neither uttered a word as they parried and feinted and strained for the advantage

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that was to decide which was to die by the knife, and which by the sea, that they had both so many times defied.

The half-breed proved so much the stronger that by virtue of sheer strength he twice had his weapon at his adversary's heart, but the other as often wriggled out of his opponent's vise-like grip, and as he narrowly made his last escape in this way the galley man slashed the dirty-brown cheek of the half-breed so generously that blood began to fleck the cabin walls and floor. It was the supreme test between nimble dexterity and brute strength.

The *Pez Volador* was rapidly filling. Some freak of the storm had driven her half a mile out to sea. And it had been ordained that the drama in progress on her storm-swept deck should not be acted out to the death.

As some of her flimsy compartment walls gave way with the inrush of water below decks, the *Pez Volador* suddenly lurched wildly and settled by the stern, and simultaneously a roaring wall of water that shot from port to starboard across her after deck carried away the cabin, a mere mass of wreckage.

And caught up and entangled in the débris of the schooner's cabin, the man who had been her master, by some caprice of fate, was borne far out and dropped into the maw of the raging sea, while his opponent, breaking away from the crazed half-breed at the moment the huge sea rushed inboard, struggled to a hatch ring and held on there until he could fight his way forward.

The angle of the deck made progress almost impossible, but by clinging to the rail the galley man succeeded in reaching an object on which his eyes had alighted by chance on coming aboard the wreck. It was a broken section of raft that had been chucked with other refuse into a workshop in the bow of the schooner. He who now fought the elements to gain it had little dreamed that it would ever again be useful on a stranded ship.

From the mess of odds and ends he selected a broken oar, fastened a line to the section of raft and, paying out the rope, let it slide down the inclined deck to the water, now seething and pounding amidships. This done, he descended along the rail as he had come. The raft already was rising and falling on the pulse of the driving seas. The darkness made the galley man's work doubly difficult, for the schooner was now lurching groggily, horribly.

Lashing himself to the raft, the sailor cast a last look at the dim outlines of the schooner as she wallowed there in the embrace of the great seas that were dragging her down to death. At the corners of his tense mouth there was a near-smile. After all, he had won. His revenge could scarcely have been more complete or satisfying.

A sea caught his piece of raft and swept it away from the *Pez Volador* just as the pest-ship settled and disappeared. The drama of the sea was at an end.

THAT was the tale that Tankersley told me five years afterward as we lingered one evening over a Scotch and soda in the "Seaman's Palace," in the quaint old Aspinwall that is now Colon, Panama.

The Eskimoish little red men of the San Blas country, whither he had landed and wandered, had canoed him down to Colon, where he had again "signed on" and disappeared.

On this particular evening I—don't specu-speculate on who *I* am, but wait—had almost despaired of my regular feature story for the Sunday edition of the *Isthmian News*, but luck at last came my way when I tarried a moment in the "Seaman's Palace" to fortify myself against the equatorial heat, and there managed to scrape a bar acquaintance with a sunburned and battered-looking officer of the steamship *Zandia*, just in from Rio de Janeiro.

I noted that he bore a mate's rating and had the look of a man who had long followed the sea. My hopes rose in leaps and bounds, for my journalistic nose scented a good yarn fresh from the salt sea.

I proposed a drink and we ensconsced ourselves at one of the marble-topped tables, surrounded by a seafaring fraternity from every part of the world. Then it was that I suddenly found myself scrutinizing my companion's face. There was something about it that was strangely familiar, something which mystified me immeasurably.

It took me five minutes to decipher the mate's weather-beaten face, and even when I knew that I had him right I gave no sign of recognition, for he had already launched upon a story which, whether it has interested you or not, held me spellbound. Maybe it was because its narrator was

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Tankersley and the tale was about himself.

At last the ex-galley man drained his glass and sat smiling across the table at me with a look of curious satisfaction. His expression, his whole manner, was that of one who exults in holding his listener at a disadvantage.

"Don't close your story yet," he said, as I hastened to pencil a few notes, "I've got a curious twist for your last paragraph."

I paused, pencil in air, and glanced at him questioningly. He was gazing away with his great blue eyes toward a little knot of intoxicated Chilean sailors, but the queer smile that had so piqued my curiosity had not vanished.

"Now," he said, still fixedly regarding the west coast seamen, "I suppose you could not imagine why, among my fairly large assortment of salt yarns, I happened this evening to choose that long-forgotten greaser captain story as one that I knew would interest you?"

I acknowledged my ignorance, wondering what the galley man could be driving at.

"Well," he went on, covertly indicating the group of hilarious Chileans, you see that gorilla-faced seaman with the bo's'n's rating?"

I could hardly have helped seeing him, since he was the possessor of the most villainous-looking and repulsive face that I had ever beheld. He had the shifty, piercing eye of some wild animal of prey. Across his right cheek extended a livid cicatrice from which his scattering beard fell away as though to lend the unsightly thing prominence.

As I gazed at the man I felt a strange thrill, and then it gradually dawned upon me that the fellow who so unaccountably repelled was not a stranger to me. I became so absorbed in a study of his dark, cruel face that I was almost unconscious of Tankersley's presence until I felt his hand on my arm. There must have been eager interrogation in my eyes as I swung 'round on him.

"The greaser captain," he said, quietly smiling and nodding, "I see you've recognized him by my description. I saw him when he sat down here and that's how I came to recall the yarn of the greaser captain. It's sure him!"

"But—" I protested, and then hesitated.

"No," smiled the galley man grimly; "must have got ashore on the wreckage of the cabin."

I was getting something more than a Sunday story. It had been an evening of surprises. It was now my turn. I leaned forward across the table oracularly, and the smile that had advertised the galley man's advantage of me flickered and went out. It was I who was smiling now under the luxuriant full beard of which I was rather vain. It was I who was now master of the sensational, the unexpected.

"I did not recognize the greaser captain from your description," I said, "nor by the conspicuous brand you left upon his cheek."

There was a moment's dead silence; then the mate of the *Zandia* gasped, stared, sprang to his feet and cried—

"Who in the devil are you?"

"I am an average tramping Englishman," I replied quietly. "You may remember me as a brother mutineer on the *Pez Volador*. My name is Nicholson."

THAT same night the boatswain of a Chilean freighter was shot dead by the mate of a Rio steamship, the *Zandia*, in a saloon fight; and a learned jury later returned a verdict of "justifiable homicide."

There was just one man on earth who knew that the mate had provoked that fight and why—and that man was the teller of this tale! Devious indeed are the ways of justice.

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WITH THE JOKER WILD

by WC Tuttle

Author of "Hair-Trigger Hollibaugh," "Mary's Little Lamb," etc.

THIS ain't no poker story. I ain't going to try and cold-deck anybody into thinking it is, so I'll orate right now that she ain't. I aims to prove uh little moral, and yuh can't prove no morals in uh poker story, 'cause there ain't no morals in that game.

All I wants to do is to cinch the fact that honesty is the best policy, and that wisdom ain't uh better hand than luck. I played in uh poker game once, where the deuces run wild. It wasn't poker—it was suicide. Over on the coast they sometimes plays with the joker wild. They opens the game with uh silent prayer and deals five cards apiece. Before they discards they wires for the police, coroner, and notifies their families. Then they spends the interim—that word seems to fit exactly, 'cause it looks like interment—trying to find out where the joker fits into uh straight.

Honesty is the best policy. The feller who first uttered them words said more in five movements of his vocal cords than the person did in eight, when "A fool and his money are soon parted" was coined. Magpie Simpkins was uh wise man. I say, "was wise," because after he got wise to himself he found that he was uh fool—but he'll never admit it.

Magpie is six feet several inches of wisdom and deduction and so forth and so on. He's tried every course from hair-oil to hypnotism to make himself admired of everybody, but he still wiggles along, sluicing gravel, herding uh burro and predicting that he's got Solomon looking half-witted.

Me? I'm Ike Harper, Magpie's pardner. I wished him on to me one time over in Helena, when he was suffering with uh rash, brought on by trying to convince uh wildcat that the human eye is stronger than four feet full uh claws. Me and that animated fish-pole has seen ups and downs ever since.

We're living in plenty and more or less peace, when we holds uh meeting or two together, and decides that there must be gold on Whispering Crick. Whispering Crick has much in common with all other cricks. It rises at its head and flows into uh river. It carries enough water for uh good sluice all the year around, which makes it uh pleasant place to prospect, even if there ain't no gold.

Me and Magpie pilgrims to Whispering Crick, which is about eighty miles from Piperock, where we live, and in another county.

Magpie always expounded the theory that gold is where yuh find it, and that's where we found it. Right where the pay streak couldn't possibly be we found it, and then Magpie sets down and reads me uh lengthy sermon on hunches and wisdom.

Did yuh ever see more than enough gold? That's how the streak looks to me and Magpie. We strips uh piece uh bedrock, and carries it down to the crick in

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sacks, and I pans out uh pirate's hoard, while Magpie pilgrims to town to file the location of the "Golden Hunch."

We locates the only place on the crick where uh piece uh gold would have uh chance to stop. We got forty acres, with about two hundred feet in the narrowest place, and from that on down, and above, the cañon is so narrow uh goat couldn't find uh footing. There's just one difficulty: the crick is lower than the rich ground, and too far away.

Me and Magpie parades around the place like uh pair uh bankers, and then decides that we got to build uh dam, and to build uh dam we got to import uh sawmill. Also we got to hire uh crew uh men, cause we're too rich to labor.

As Magpie says—

"Why get strong in the muscle and weak in the head?"

We hires uh bunch uh poor men to swamp out uh road for about twenty miles, to the county road, and then Magpie goes out to dicker for uh small mill.

This is the first time that me and Magpie has owned anything better than fifty cents uh pan—every fifty or sixty pans—so we feels like uh bronc in his first bunch-grass.

One afternoon, after we gets our sawmill to running, and has uh force uh men on the dam, uh prospector name uh "Hailstorm" Wilson, drifts in. Hailstorm was born to sorrow. Life to him is just one "can't" after another, and he ain't happy unless he brings bad news. Me and Magpie makes him welcome as the flowers in May, and sets down to show him, in figures, just how rich we are.

"Going to build uh big dam, eh?" remarks Hailstorm, sad-like. "Where yuh going to get your timber?"

"Right here on the ground," says Magpie, taking in uh sweep of the country with his two hands. "We got enough right here to build several dams."

"Uh-huh," agrees Hailstorm, nodding his head slowly. "There sure is, but ——"

"But what?" I asks.

"Forest reserve. I reckon, according to what I can find out, you're entitled to firewood and enough to build uh shack, but when it comes to putting in uh sawmill —well, it can't be done—legally."

"Can't, eh?" yelps Magpie. "Who's to stop me, eh?"

"Government, Magpie. Suppose uh supervisor comes up here and says—'Magpie Simpkins and Ike Harper, you're under arrest for cutting more timber than the law allows.' What yuh going to do then, eh? What good is uh lot uh gold going to do yuh while yuh languish in durance vile?"

"Well," grins Magpie, "when uh feller's got uh lot uh yaller gold he looks good to most everybody, Hailstorm. When I shows that supervisor what uh good feller I can be—well——"

Hailstorm nods and spits at uh lizard:

"Uh-huh. Maybe yuh could if yuh made the price right, Magpie. Yuh can't pike in uh case like that."

"Not me," boasts Magpie, wise-like. "I got too many brains to be uh piker in uh case like that. When it comes to handling delicate situations I'm there like uh coyote at uh carcass—me."

Hailstorm and his burro pilgrims off into the hills, and we keeps right on sawing timber. I don't feel safe, and I tells Magpie.

"Gosh a'mighty, Ike!" he snaps. "Quit worrying. We ain't prospectors no more—we're financiers. Sabe? As soon as this dam is finished we'll take out uh million. You quit worrying, and let me handle the brainy end uh this deal. Maybe they won't never show up, but if they does—you watch Magpie Simpkins."

"Yes'm," says I. "I'll watch yuh all right, old-timer. But what good is gold to me if Uncle Sam is sending meals to me by uh warden? I don't know what the penalty is, but it'll be uh plenty."

Magpie, don't absorb the gloom uh tall, but just sets there and smokes cigarets by the yard and grins under his mustache.

"Ike," says he, "when we milks this here Whispering Crick dry I'm going to take uh trip to Boston and buy uh set uh books I seen advertised in uh paper. What are yuh going to do with your money?"

"Me?" I asks. "Well, I reckon I'll take uh trip over to Maine, and buy uh canoe I seen advertised once."

"Canoe?" he asks. "What in —— will you do with uh canoe, Ike?"

"I'll bring it up here, Magpie. I'll stick her in the water, just above that white whirl down there, and when you starts reading out loud to me from one uh them books, I'll cut the rope and jump in. Maybe I'll eat uh few dynamite-caps so as to make it uh cinch."

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FOR the next few weeks we're some busy. We got uh force uh men on the dam, one on the sluice and another in the mill. As soon as the dam is finished we starts to cleaning uh little bed-rock. We've taken out enough to make the golden calf they tells about in the Bible look like an 1876 penny, when this here Hailstorm Wilson pilgrims in once more, and looks us up in our treasury.

"I'm uh friend in need," he states, nodding sad-like, when we welcomes him in.

"How much do yuh need, Hailstorm?" asks Magpie.

Hailstorm peers off down the road, wipes away uh stray tear, and whispers—

"Supervisor!"

Magpie hitches up his belt and pats himself on the chest.

"Fear not," says he. "Leave him to me, and all will be well."

"Two of 'em," states Hailstorm. "District and State."

"Two is company," grins Magpie. "Two is easier to hornswoggle than one."

"Seen 'em down to Devil's Turn," orates Hailstorm. "Uh course it ain't no funerial uh mine, but I goes plumb out uh my way to inform yuh, Magpie. Things like that grieves me uh heap."

Magpie separates our treasury from several goodly lumps uh gold as uh present to Hailstorm, and said Hailstorm goes on his way rejoicing. I chides Magpie for his generosity, and then has to listen for an hour to uh sermon on thankfulness.

"What do yuh reckon I ought to do—foller him up and kiss him?" I asks, when Magpie ceases. "You don't need to chide me, Magpie. Being uh bringer uh bad news is reward enough for Hailstorm. We're in uh lovely fix, if yuh asks Ike Harper. You're going to bust your pick when you tries to bribe officials, Magpie."

"Am, am I?" he snaps. "You watch me, Ike. Every man has his price."

"Well," says I, "if you're buying things today, Mister Simpkins, yuh might make me an offer for half uh the Golden Hunch before them supervisors shows up. I'm having uh sale today—me."

"Ike," Magpie puts uh quart uh tears in his voice, and lays his hand on my shoulder. "Ike, have no fear. Remember you got uh resourceful pardner in me. You keep in the background, and don't have nothing to say. Be sort of uh silent pardner. Sabe? Just leave it all to little Magpie, and I'll make yuh proud to know me."

"I'll keep in the background, all right, Magpie. Silent? Say, old-timer, any time I'm in the shadow of the law I'm so silent that you could hear uh clam, under sixteen feet uh Missouri mud, calling to its mate."

Long in the afternoon uh livery rig drives in from Devil's Turn and unloads uh couple uh men, and then leaves. Magpie don't waste no time in getting acquainted and extending uh welcome. One is uh tall, dark hombre and the other is shorter and runs uh little to gray on top. They both wears store clothes and boiled collars, and they each got uh valise, which Magpie packs up to our wickiup and places under our bunks.

"We're mighty glad to see yuh," orates Magpie, bowing each of 'em to uh chair, the same uh which makes me set on the steps.

"Quite some camp yuh got here," remarks the short feller. "Must be money here, eh?"

"Uh-huh," agrees Magpie. "Yuh might say there is. Would you like to look over the works?"

"I wouldn't—" I starts to cut in, but Magpie shuts me right up.

"Ike, you better get back on the job," he states. "I got company to entertain, and you got work to do. I can't pay my hired help for loafing. Sabe?"

That makes me so mad that I goes down and sets on the dam, and wishes I had that canoe right now. After a while I sees Magpie and them two supervisors emerge from the cabin and wander down to where some men are cleaning some bed-rock.

They each got uh gold pan, and after they had been down there for uh while I wanders down. Them two hombres are some enthusiastic, believe me, and they're panning dirt like they was doing it for uh living.

"Look!" yelps the tall feller, poking around in his pan. I sees Magpie wink at Swede Carlson, who is bossing the gang, and the Swede grins.

"Let me get yuh uh pan uh dirt," says Magpie. Him and Swede takes that pan and fills it with jewelry. When they're cleaning bed-rock they finds nuggets in the deep crevices, which they digs out and stacks in little heaps.

I reckon that feller's pan would run about fifty dollars, and he wails with joy.

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Then Magpie and Swede does the same to the other feller's pan. It's just like letting uh man dig down into your pockets on pay-day. It ain't no hard job to swipe uh hundred or two in uh case like that, but it ain't my place to act as lookout in uh game like that. I estimates how much ham and aigs I could buy with what we'll lose, and the figures brings tears to my eyes.

Don't get the idea that Ike Harper is stingy. He ain't. When they starts out on more pans of the same stuff my eyes gets so full uh tears that I can't see, so I goes out into the timber and weeps alone. After the irrigation season is over I goes back to the cabin, and finds them in there weighing the gold.

"Yours weighs twenty ounces," announces Magpie to the tall Jasper. "And the other gentleman gets twenty-three."

Magpie talks like uh referee at uh raffle, and I wonders where I laid my gun.

"Wonderful ground!" exclaims the oldest one. "Isn't it great to pan out real money like that! The feel of it makes me wish it all belonged to me."

"It does," states Magpie. "Do yuh think I took yuh down there to pan out gold for me? Not any. You fellers can split them forty-three ounces as uh present from the Golden Hunch. Sabe?"

"What's the main idea?" asks the tall one, looking at Magpie in uh queer way.

"Listen; did yuh ever hear of the virtue of blindness?"

"Uh-huh," agrees the tall one, with uh slow grin. "I have, but not in just that way."

"Well," says Magpie, "uh man's duty is sacred, but he can always go deaf, dumb and blind and not hurt nobody. Sabe? Sometimes it pays to be near-sighted."

Them two supervisors looks at each other for uh few seconds and then at the gold, and they both nods. The tall one gets up and stretches his frame.

"Under them circumstances we sabe your proposition," says he. "I'd like to have uh little talk with my friend, so if yuh don't mind we'll take uh little walk over the works."

"She's yours," says Magpie. "Go right ahead and take your own time. If yuh see anything you want, take it. The keys of the Golden Hunch are yours."

We sees 'em wander right up to our dam, and set down on uh pile uh new lumber.

"WELL," says I, "they've found it, Magpie. They got about eight hundred of our money and you ain't even got uh receipt. Why didn't yuh wait until they puts uh price on themselves?"

"Ike, you're uh silent pardner in this. Sabe? We ain't going to go to no jail. You don't sabe political finance, Ike, and therefore you're uh step behind the progress uh civilization. I knows how to handle 'em. Them fellers has got to figure out how much it's worth to them."

"What are they going to do? Give us back some change?" I asks.

"Eight hundred ain't much in uh case like this, Ike."

"Ain't, eh?" I retorts. "Before we locates this mine, Magpie, eight dollars would have seemed uh lot if the case was first-degree murder. You ain't going to give 'em more, are yuh?"

"Ike, yuh can't be uh piker in uh case like this."

"Santa Claus," says I, "you can give 'em your immortal soul and honor, but I'll be danged if you gives 'em any more uh that jewelry gravel—not while Ike Harper lives."

I goes down and sets on the bank the rest of the day, but they don't show up again.

I'm so mad that I don't eat with them at supper. Later on I goes up to the shack, and finds Magpie on the steps smoking uh cigaret.

"Well, Andrew Rockefeller, you got rid of all your filthy money?" I asks. "I just happens to think that them Boston books will be fine to stock some uh them libraries you're giving away today."

"Go take uh ride in your little canoe, Ike," he grins. "Things is coming our way, just like I said. They may leave tomorrow."

"Yes?" says I. "I'd leave, too, if I had eight hundred dollars. What right they got to all that money, Magpie?"

"Ike, yuh got to pay for them things. Them two supervisors comes up here to wish us into the pen. They comes with malice in their hearts, and I meets 'em like they was potentates.

"They sizes up things,and from the way I treats 'em they begins to think: 'Well, this here Simpkins person ain't no bad hombre. He's big-hearted and open-handed. He's real folks. He treats us like we was royalty, and we ain't got the heart to

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yell about uh few feet uh timber. Uh course we got to be paid expenses for the trip.'

"Now, ain't that deduction, Ike?"

"Yes," says I. "Your reasoning is as wise as the wau-wau of an owl, which consists uh hoots. You sure treats 'em royal, Magpie. I don't know what it costs to travel, but two broncs and uh buckboard over forty miles uh passable road is well paid at eight hundred dollars. Dog-gone it, Magpie, I'd inch that distance on my back for that money."

Magpie smokes away on his cigaret for uh while and then opines:

"You'd lose money and skin, Ike. You couldn't average more than two inches at uh wiggle, could yuh? Well, you never could wiggle the last ten miles. Now thirty miles would mean one million, nine hundred thousand, eight hundred inches, which would mean nine hundred and fifty thousand, four hundred wiggles. Figuring an average of ten wiggles to the minute—yuh can't figure more than that on account of meals and so forth, Ike, you——"

"Magpie," says I, "you said that every man had uh price. What's yours?"

"Huh! What yuh want to know for?"

"I wants to see if I got enough to buy you, Magpie. If I got enough I'll take yuh, old-timer, cause the law gives uh man the right to kill anything he buys."

Just then them two supervisors shows up, and sets down with us.

"We must find uh place to sleep tonight," states the tall one, and Magpie immediate and soon gets generous again.

"Take our beds," says he. "Right inside is two fine bunks, and I'd deem it uh favor to the Golden Hunch if you'd accept. You'd have the seclusion that should be accorded to honored guests."

"Pshaw!" exclaims the tall one. "We don't like to deprive you gents of your beds thataway."

"No depredation uh tall," says Magpie. "You fellers go right in and go to bed. I'll tell the cook to have uh good breakfast for yuh. Don't hurry, 'cause he works all day."

"Magpie," says I, after they shuts the door. "Do you know what *mesika hyas pelton* means?"

"No," says he.

"Well, in the Chinook jargon it means that you're uh danged fool. The word *hyas* may be used for any adjective yuh feels like. If yuh can think of anything real nasty and expressive yuh can tack it on in place of the word danged that I used. I'd love you, Magpie—if you was dead! You gives up our good beds to them gol-blasted officials—dang your string-bean carcass to thunder!"

"We'll sleep in the bunk-house, Ike. There's an empty bunk."

"Yes!" I snorts. "We'll sleep in the bunk-house and get lousy. Aw, don't tell me that there ain't no itch-bugs in there, Magpie. I seen them six hombres from Cinnamon Crick scratching each other like uh bunch uh monkeys. I hope you gets 'em in your mustache and has to shave it off."

"Don't get sore, Ike," says he, soothing like. "After tomorrow these forest officials will be gone, and life will be one pleasure after another."

"One grayback after another," says I. "Some day, Magpie, I'll trust your judgment too far, and have to kill you to protect my life. I hope them fellers don't get to monkeying with my new pearl-handled six-gun. It's on my bunk, and she's mighty easy on the trigger."

"How much did that gun cost yuh, Ike?" he asks.

"I didn't buy it. Weinie Lopp gave it to me for my birthday. It's the only birthday present I ever had, and I thinks uh heap of it."

"Pshaw! That's too bad, Ike."

"What's too bad?" I asks.

"Well, yuh see it was laying around there, and this tall supervisor seen it, and went plumb crazy over the hang of the barrel. Well, I——"

"You gave it to him, Magpie?"

It ain't often that I gets mad. Paw always told me to count to uh hundred when I felt my gorge arising.

Twice I felt her rise, and got licked before I counted to fifteen, but this time I forgets paw's teachings, and me and Magpie goes into the dirt.

We does uh double flip-flop off the steps, and out comes this tall pistol coveter to try and act as peacemaker.

UH CANUCK, from over in the Bitter Roots, showed me one day how to kick from uh reclining position, and when that lanky person opines

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to break my clinch I drove my boot against the waistband of his pants in front so hard that it scraped the label off the tobacco sack in his hip-pocket.

I'm riled. I bounces Magpie's head on the ground uh couple uh times, ties his mustache behind his ears, and pilgrims right into that shack to get my gun. I has to step right over the one I kicked. He looks up at me, sort uh vacant-like, and mumbles something about the Milky Way, but I don't sabe astronomy, so I don't argue with him over it.

I goes down to the bunk-house and crawls into that vacant bunk, and in about an hour Magpie shows up. He bears testimony to the fact that the Harper tribe is rowdyish at times, but he don't say much.

"Some folks is born without tact," says Magpie, sort uh melancholy, after uh while. "Now, that gun never cost uh cent over thirty-five dollars, and I has to pay that person about ten times that much to keep him in good humor. It was like taking candy from an urchin before, but when uh bull gets into uh chiny shop it sure costs uh lot for re-pairs, if yuh asks me."

"Magpie, did you pay him for that kick I landed?" I asks.

"The almighty dollar cureth all ills," says he. "Enough of it is uh balm for aching feelings."

"I'll take uh million," says I. "I've got ills and aching feelings. If them two Jaspers don't pack their little satchels and pilgrim tomorrow I'm going down and give myself up. I feels suspicious. They ain't said what their price is yet, have they, Magpie?"

"Well—not exactly."

"What do yuh mean?"

"Well, Ike, I showed 'em that bunch of twenty-two hundred in selected nuggets, and the tall one grins uh heap, and says—'Uh man could forget honor and duty to own uh bunch like that,' and the other feller nods uh heap. Now, if that ain't uh tip, what is?"

"And you would give them that bunch, Magpie?" I asks.

"Ike, you can't—simply can't seem to understand the gravity of this business. Why, uh feller can't be small in uh case like this one. You almost made that feller sore at us when you kicked him."

"Gosh, he must be touchy," says I. "Some folks carries their feelings on their sleeves thataway. I got uh good notion to go up there and kick 'em both out and take our own bed. It's pleasant to know that you're bedded down with uh crazy man and uh blanket full uh bugs. I always knowed that you was crazy, Magpie, but I never thought you'd be crazy enough to give away uh thousand. They ain't never introduced themselves nor made any threats. Seems to me that you're buying something you don't have to."

"Names don't count in uh transaction like this. The less said the better. Sabe? We're in just as bad as they are if anybody should happen to ask yuh, Ike. Bribery is uh crime."

"It is," I agrees. "It should be abolished. It should be abolished or confined to your own home. It is as criminal to give as to receive, and I'm in favor uh hanging all three of yuh, Magpie."

The next morning we sure got up early. I was right when I said that them fellers wasn't scratching for fun. Me and Magpie itched 'fore breakfast and itched after breakfast. I didn't see them supervisors at breakfast, so, between itches, I asks Magpie where they are.

"I—er—sent their breakfast up to the shack. They're likely tired out, and in uh case like this yuh got to be considerate, Ike."

"I suppose yuh showed 'em where the hooch bottle was, too, didn't yuh?"

"My gosh, Ike!" he snaps. "Ain't you got no hospitality in your system? You makes me tired. Here I been tasking my brains to get us out of uh mess, and all you do is to act as an anchor."

What can yuh do with uh hombre like that? I goes out and sets on uh stump and offers up thanksgiving that I was born without any brains. Magpie goes whistling and scratching up to our shack, and after uh while he sticks out his head and yells for me to come up. I spins the cylinder of my gun, and enters the place.

"Ike," says he, "I wants yuh to witness uh bill uh sale."

"Bill uh sale?" I asks. "What yuh selling?"

"One pack outfit, consisting of four burros, saddles, pack-sacks, ropes and so forth and so forth."

"So? Who's buying said outfit?"

"These gentlemen," says he, indicating the two supervisors.

"Yuh see," he explains, "They desires

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to penetrate the interior, and there ain't nothing better than uh burro when it comes to uh pilgrimage. Being as I don't need said animiles I'm turning same over to said gentlemen. Sabe?"

"Mighty kind and thoughtful uh you, I'm sure," states the older one. "You sure are uh white man, and I hopes yuh do well."

"He will," says I, signing the bill uh sale.

I figures that Magpie held 'em up for uh good price on them mules, and we don't need 'em much.

"Now," says I, "if there's anything more I can do before I loses my mind, Magpie, stack me up against it."

"Thanks, Mister Harper," says Magpie. "Everything is satisfactory. I'll get you gents uh bunch uh grub out of the storehouse pretty soon and then you'll be in shape to travel."

Them two hombres goes out with Magpie, so I unearths the hooch bottle. There ain't enough left to moisten uh wood-tick's right front leg. Them forest officials sure are intemperate.

Magpie comes in after uh while, and sprawls on the bunk. He's got uh satisfied look on his face, and he pats himself on the chest.

"Ike," says he, "this sure is one brainy task. Nothing to fear from now on. We can strip this here Whispering Crick bare and cut all the timber we need, 'cause these supervisors ain't going to bother us none in the future. They got theirs."

"And mine and yours," says I. "You ain't got no sense, Magpie. There's just as much difference between brains and sense as there is between generosity and insanity. You think you got any real brains, Magpie? You're wrong if yuh do."

"Well," says he, twisting his long mustache, "I sure handled uh delicate situation in uh way that would appear that I got uh little gray matter under my hat."

"Did you give them that bunch uh nuggets?" I yelps, when I sees that empty pan on the table. "My ——! Magpie, you didn't——"

"I did," says he. "Freedom from worry is worth it, Ike. We'll get uh lot more."

"Well, of all the easily bled, insane—say, Magpie, how much did yuh get for them burros and grub?"

"I threw that in, Ike."

I DON'T say uh word for some time. I'm all choked up with emotion over it. I tell yuh it's great to have uh pardner who has uh heart like that. Think of the things uh man like that can do for yuh—and to yuh. After uh while I picks my old war-sack from behind my bunk, and begins to stuff it with old socks and so forth. And all this time I'm counting: "eighty-eight, eighty-nine, ninety——"

"You got that many pairs uh socks?" asks Magpie, and I realizes that I been counting out loud.

So as not to make any mistake, I starts in at fifty again. I don't want to disregard my old paw's advice, and I sure can feel that gorge rising.

"What yuh doing now, Ike? Counting thataway."

"Counting graybacks, you long, limber-jointed horn-uh-plenty!" I snaps, and keeps on filling the sack.

"What yuh aiming to do, Ike?" he asks.

"Me?" I stops work, and looks him square in the eyes. "Me? I'm going away—me! I don't hanker to have riches, Mister Simpkins. I'm an ordinary old pelican, and I don't appreciate brains. I'm going to drag the prize nut out of the first lunatic asylum I comes to. Sabe? What am I going to do that for? Well, I'm going to form uh pardnership with said nut, go away out on the desert where there never was nor never will be any gold, and starve to death with him. He ain't got no brains, and if I talks real nice to him he'll let me die in peace."

"Aw, yuh can't do that, Ike," he protests. "Don't get sore at me 'cause you ain't got no sabe for finance. You and me is in shape to take out uh fortune right now. Ike, old-timer, we've seen uh lot of ups and downs together—mostly downs, so let's stick together and see if they won't be all ups now."

"Like uh little balloon, Magpie," says I. "Just like uh balloon.

"After we gets up just so high you has to puncture the bag with your generosity and —brains, and down we comes. You sure are one cheerful little giver. Give 'em all the gold we got, give 'em mules to carry it away with and grub to eat on the way. Why, Magpie, you ain't even honest in your gifts. It was plain bribery."

"You don't need to yell it from the tree-

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tops," he reminds me. "You're part owner —remember that, Ike? I'm going down to see that they gets away in good shape."

After he's gone uh while, somebody knocks on the door. I walks over and admits Swede. He looks as solemn as an undertaker and wads up his dirty hat in his hands.

"Aye yust come up to tell you maybe dot paystreak ain't bane vid us no more," he states.

"What?" I yelps. "What did you say?"

"Val, aye ain't sure. You see, ve strip oll dot bed-rock above und below where ve get der rich streak, but she don't go much better as two-bits uh pan. Aye tank maybe she's uh pocket. But den of course ve maybe find anodder pocket—maybe."

"Yes, in your pants!" I yowls. "Do you mean to tell me that the paystreak is only twenty-feet long?"

"Yust fine color above unt below. Maybe if ve cut furder up——"

"My ——!" says I. "The balloon is leaking already."

I sets there on uh box and tries to remember how it feels to be broke again, when I happens to see the end of uh valise under my bunk.

"Well," says I to myself. "I wonder if them supervisors is forgetting their property?

I hauls out the two valises, and looks out the window. Them two hombres are each on a burro, and they got the other two plumb loaded down with stuff that cost us five cents uh pound to get hauled in.

I grabs them valises and pilgrims right down toward them two departing pirates. Magpie sees me coming and meets me half way.

"Where yuh going, Ike?" he asks, but I don't heed him none, and goes straight for the supervisors.

"Hey! Ike," yells Magpie, from my rear. "Take them valises back to the shack. They're going to leave 'em with us until they returns. Sabe?"

"I will like——!" I yells. "Since when did the Golden Hunch turn into uh storage warehouse? There ain't going tobe no reason for them two to ever come back here, Magpie."

"Have uh little sense, Ike," wails Magpie, in my ear. "Don't do or say anything to disturb the serenity of their departure."

He grabs me by the arm and swings me around.

"Bing!"

I hits him square in the head with uh valise, as I pivots on one heel, and I puts uh lot uh animation in the punch. I hears one of them supervisors yip as I enters their midst over Magpie's recumbent form, and then I'm among them.

The tall one makes uh swipe at me with the rope, as his burro crow-hops past me, but he misses and I comes up with uh pickhandle in my paws. Uh burro ain't exactly what you'd designate as uh getaway animile, being of an inquiring disposition, and this one is no exception. It whirls after uh couple uh bucks and comes right back past me.

I don't propose to be the pivot to no merry-go-round, so I simply sticks that pick-handle between its front legs as it goes past, and that tall supervisor skates off down the hard trail on his face, with the burro setting on his legs.

The other supervisor is having one hy-iu time trying to get his beast uh burden into uh lope, so I gallops right along in his wake, and catches him inside two hundred yards. I gets that burro by the tail long enough to slam it in the ribs a couple uh times with that pick-handle, and then I embraces uh tree to keep from going on down hill.

Yuh can't fool uh burro. That dun-colored, overgrown jack-rabbit knowed just exactly what I wanted done, and went right ahead and did it. The trail ain't wide enough for classy work, so it leaves the trail and carves uh future for itself right down through the brush and over slide-rock.

That supervisor rode well, I'll say that much for him, but flesh and blood can only stand so much. As they fades out of the picture, I sees the supervisor's heels go up and forward and there comes daylight between man and beast. I removes my hat and orates to whom it may concern—

"Well done thou good and faithful jackass."

I'm feeling vivacious and whistles like uh medder lark as I pilgrims back toward the bunk-house, and meets some more of the parade.

Here comes the tall feller, walking like uh man in uh dream. He's got his arm twined lovingly around the neck of one uh them pack-burros, and the other is poking along in the rear, and here they comes, man weaving and burros wondering.

I passes the time uh day with them all,

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but the burros seems to be the only ones to pay any attention. I steps up on the uphill side and walks along with 'em for uh few steps, but that tall hombre don't seem to even see me.

I reckon that when the burro turns up flip-flop that supervisor must uh sprained his whole system from his heels to his hair, 'cause he walks like uh man in uh dream. He don't even bat an eye when I speaks—just walks along with them burros, like uh toy what has been wound up and has got to run down.

"Well," says I out loud, "Far be it from Ike Harper to interrupt uh loving scene like that, but—"

So I takes my pocket-knife out and cuts swing-rope and cinch, and they pilgrims right along down the trail minus the packs. The supervisor didn't seem to mind and I know the other two jacks didn't.

I watches 'em off down to the bottom of the trail, and then I pilgrims on up to the bunk-house, where I finds Magpie setting on the ground with one foot inside uh valise, and uh mad look on his face.

"Now look what you've done!" he wails. "Dog-gone, I'll bet you've hurt their feelings again, Ike Harper. You ain't got uh trace uh finess in your system."

"Finess?"

"Yes, finess!" he snaps. "If you had any brains you'd know what that means."

"If I had any brains I wouldn't be your pardner," I retorts. "You've give away about all the money we got and Swede just informs me that our paystreak was only uh pocket."

He looks at me, with his mouth working like uh fish out uh water.

"My ——!" he howls. "We ain't got nothing left."

"Nothing," I agrees. "Not even our honor."

Just then Swede comes around the corner.

"Hey! Mister Simpkins. Two yentlemen comes to see you. Ay'll bring dem up."

"Who are they, Swede?" I asks, thinking maybe them two is back.

"Val, von is de sheriff, and aye ain't sure about de odder. Aye tank he bane forest ranger."

Magpie and me looks at each other, sort uh sad like. I feels like the feller did who fought fire for an hour to keep from burning to death, and then got drowned when his hose busted.

"What will we do?" wails Magpie.

"Finess," says I. "Give 'em the mill."

AROUND the corner comes two men, and me and Magpie shrinks like uh woolen sock in boiling water.

"Howdy," says the tall, hairy one. "Are you the owner uh this property?"

Magpie swallers hard and looks at me, but I says:

"He is. I'm just uh hired hindrance."

Magpie looks at me, with his mouth open like uh winded duck, and his Adam's apple hops up and down his long neck.

"I'm Bill Blewett, sheriff uh this here county," states the person who opened the conversation. "This here gent with me is Mister Walden, the forest ranger. We're looking for information. Sabe?"

"Yes'm," says I. "That's about all that's left. How'll yuh have it?"

"I'm looking for uh tall hombre, dark complected, and his pardner, who is short and uh bit gray on the hair. Couple uh tin-horns. Sabe? Specialize on cleaning up camps after payday. Got uh little roulette wheel.

"The tall one got previous with uh gun down at Devil's Turn, and we wants to ask him uh few questions. Just dropped in, thinking they might uh stopped, being as your payday is about due."

"You're uh forest ranger?" I asks, looking at the sheriff's companion, and he nods.

"Uh-huh," says he. "I just rode in with the sheriff. Uh course this ain't reserve land, but I likes to keep posted on mining operations this near my district."

"You ever have visits from supervisors?" I asks, offhand like.

"Sure. Two of 'em visited me this week. Left yesterday."

They thanks us and rides away.

"Magpie," says I. "It's uh wonder you wouldn't stand up when yuh receives company."

"I—I—I know it ain't dignified, Ike, but every time I moves it hurts me like blazes."

He struggles to uh standing position, and something unhooks from the seat of his pants and spins on the ground.

"Roulette wheel!" he yelps. "Baby roulette wheel, and I impales my carcass on the spindle—dang it!" He takes it and throws it as far as he can.

"All is lost!" he wails, rubbing his rear exposure. "They comes as strangers——"

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"And they took you in, Magpie," I finishes. "If I'd uh had any brains and them burros had any sense we'd uh been broke. Down the trail uh ways you'll find them two packs with our money in 'em. Sabe? The money you been trying to give away. Next time you wants to impersonate uh wise man bringing gifts try and get the right address. Sabe? You tries to plate uh couple uh tin-horns with gold, and it fills you with wonderment to think they didn't look uh gift jackass in the face, you long-nosed, animated Christmas tree—you!"

"My soul wallers in the depths uh remorse, Ike," he sobs. "It's uh good thing that we wasn't both born with brains. I was wise, but——"

"Ike Harper was uh danged fool," I finishes for him again. "Uh danged fool and his money is sometimes hard to part, Magpie. Them four burros didn't—say, Magpie, it was uh case uh three of uh kind trying to beat four jacks and the joker."

"Five jacks, Ike," corrects Magpie. "The joker was wild."

All of which shows—well, why preach?

A MOUNTAINEER'S WIT

by HAPSBURG LIEBE

EVERY mountain community must have a funny man, a good-natured and godless, good-for-nothing who is usually so poor that when he moves he has only to put out the fire and call the dogs. The funny man of Big Stony was "Loafin' Tom" Shiver. He had five lank hounds and one woman. The woman was of less importance to Tom than the dogs. Shiver's greatest sport and cardinal sin was disturbing public worship.

Came to Big Stony a traveling preacher who drew congregations so large the little log church wouldn't hold them. The days being warm, the minister had the home-made pulpit and the slab benches moved outside. Loafin' Tom had come early on this fine Sunday morning. He put his dogs on one of the benches, and ordered them to stay there, sat down and bit off a chew of tobacco.

Of course, five persons had to stand in order to thus accommodate Shiver's dogs, but nobody said anything; you see, Loafin' Tom had a rather big reputation as a fighter, and nobody wished to start a difficulty before the new preacher.

The sermon began, with "The Wisdom of the Lord" for a subject. As it went on, Loafin' Tom put red ants down the neck of the young man who sat just ahead of him, stuck a pin in one of his dogs to hear it whine, made faces at a bashful girl across the aisle, and otherwise annoyed the preacher. Then a big acorn fell from high in the oak under which he was standing, and struck the minister squarely on the top of his bald head. Loafin' Tom saw it and let out a wild guffaw.

The preacher looked straight at Shiver.

"The meetin' will be postponed," he announced, his eyes flashing, "until the show is over."

"I was jest a-wonderin'," drawled Shiver, grinning, "what would 'a' happened ef, in 'the wisdom o' the Lord,' that acorn had 'a' been a punkin! Haw! haw! haw!"

"Ef acorns was punkins," quickly replied the minister, "you'd be plum' fat. Punkins is fattenin' to hawgs. You're a hawg."

Shiver sprang to his feet. He had been publicly insulted.

"Preacher," he declared hotly, "I—I can lick you afore a dawg can wag its tail twicet!"

Whereupon the minister calmly threw off his coat, rolled his sleeves, walked down to Shiver and whipped him. Shiver picked himself up shamefacedly and looked at those around him. They were laughing. He saw that if he was ever to redeem himself as the funny man of Big Stony he would have to do it in that minute. And he did it.

He snatched up one of his five hounds and held it out toward the man who had so soundly thrashed him.

"Preacher," he drawled, "this here is the dawg I was a-talkin' about."

In spite of himself, the preacher laughed. That particular dog was tailless!

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WITH SHARP SWORD-EDGES

A Five-Part Story

Conclusion

by

Farnham Bishop

and

Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur

Authors of "In the Grip of the Minotaur," "Malena," etc.

CHAPTER XIX

HAKI ASSISTS SAINT GENEVIEVE

"SO FORTY-THOUSAND men have been besieging this town for over two years, with nothing to show for their pains but scars?" Haki sneered contemptuously. "When I was a mere lad, I came here on a Viking voyage with Hasteinn the Red. We took the place easily, and made good plunder, yet we were but a handful beside this host."

He looked out through the east portal of St. Germain-des-Prés, over the roofless, fire-blackened suburbs between it and the Grand Pont, toward the crenelated walls of the Island-City of Paris; and reminiscent greed kindled in his eyes.

"When you were a lad, Paris was unfortified," Onund Thick-Neck reminded him. "Since then the Frankish Emperor built those stone walls yonder, and made the stone ramparts and stout towers of the bridges. It is those walls and bridges, not the weapons of the townsfolk, that have kept us out."

Haki smiled irritatingly.

"The Norwegians were a better breed in my youth," he retorted.

Onund leaped up, his eyes blazing.

"Save that talk for women!" he snapped. "Have I suffered hunger, wounds, and sickness in this filthy, rain-soaked land—have I seen my good men crushed with stones and scalded with hot pitch, to be crowed over by a broken-nosed wolf like you? Make your tongue smooth when you talk to me, or by the beard of Odin, I will wet my sword in your liver!"

Still smiling, Haki swiftly reached out one hand, and plucked Onund by the drooping end of his yellow mustache. The Viking struck down the offending hand, and roaring with rage, drew his sword. Before he could avenge the insult, Haki too was on his feet, weapon in hand.

The Norwegians danced and shouted with glee.

"A fight! a fight! Mark off a square!" they shouted.

Two or three of them set to work to tear into strips a number of mantles scattered about, while others measured off a square space on the mosaic floor of the church. The rest surged in between the quarreling men, and held them apart until the square could be properly marked with the strips of cloth. When all was done, eager hands shoved Haki and Onund into the enclosure.

They watched each other like cats, each trying to edge past the other's guard. Then Onund, whom anger put at a disadvantage, leaped and struck. Haki darted back, and waited. Again the Viking leaped in, his sword flashing in a wide arc over his shoulder. Haki caught the stroke on his own blade, feinted at Onund's throat, and took advantage of his opponent's recoil to circle 'round him.

Roaring like a maddened bull, the other rounded on his cool antagonist, lashing out again and again. At last Haki saw his chance, and nimbly evading a wide swing, cut in at Onund's unprotected head. Twice he struck; and one after the other, Onund's

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long mustaches dropped to the paving, sheared through close to the cheek.

Aware only that Haki had struck and that he was still somehow unhurt, Onund learned of the ignominy that had befallen him only from the jeers and coarse jests of the onlookers. Then he looked down swiftly, saw the shorn adornments lying at his feet, and hurled himself at his enemy with concentrated hate. His heavy sword came down with terrific force; but Haki dodging, it struck against a column at the edge of the square, and broke at the point, in a shower of marble dust.

Before he could recover, Haki struck him smartly across the wrist with the blunt back of his blade, and sent the Viking's sword spinning from his hand. For a moment Onund surrendered himself to his tortured nerve-centers, nursing his wrist with the other hand; then, his face convulsed, he sprang at Haki's throat.

But the bystanders, well-versed in the duelling-code of the North, and prepared for just such a breach of it, surged up from the sides and pulled the gigantic Viking down. Laughing, Haki bowed his thanks; for strong as he was, he knew himself no match for such a champion at hand-grips.

Onund cooled off quickly.

"Whether the men were better in your youth I know not, but you are the best swordsman I have ever seen," he admitted. "If your head is as good as your arm, you will be of much help to us. Stop your jeering then, and I will keep my temper. Tell us what you would have done if you had been commanding the siege."

"I would have built siege-engines," Haki answered. "It is folly and shame to send good men against stone walls."

"But we did build engines!"

"Yes, battering-rams. I saw them. Cumbrous things, which took fifty men or more to man. You never thought to devise protection for the poor fools that swung them, did you?"

"Of course we did," Onund retorted. "We made cats—long, low sheds covered with thatch and hides, and mounted on wheels."

He pointed out over the ruins to the open fields between the suburb and the breached Petit Pont.

"There is one now."

"With its roof crushed in by stones, abandoned to the enemy," Haki observed. "Thatch and hides do not keep out stones. I will wager you thought to send out bowmen with mantlets, to cover the work of the siege-party, did you not?"

"Of course. Do you think we are idiots?"

"No, merely green at this sort of warfare. You should have built the roofs of the cats of stout timbers, and covered them with the hides. You should also have made a tower as high as the rampart of the wall, built up in front, with loop-holes for shooting, and rolled the tower up behind the cat.

"Then, so soon as the defenders showed themselves to hurl down stones, or pour pitch and melting wax, the towermen could have picked them off with arrows. Mantlets are foolish unless you use towers at the same time, for the men behind them have to shoot up, and are outranged. Now when I was in Italy, at the siege of Luna——"

Onund was getting impatient of the berserk's well-founded criticism.

"Here comes Kiotvi the Wealthy," he interrupted. "Tell it to him; he led the last attack, when we brought up long-boats from the fleet down-stream and won a footing on the island. The walls kept us off. Kiotvi will love to hear you tell how he might have avoided defeat."

"HAIL, Haki!" The exiled king of Agdir swaggered in, clapped Haki on the shoulder, and holding him off at arm's length, looked him over mischievously.

Kiotvi was a fine, straddling man of about five and thirty, tall, straight, and chested like a gorilla, with wide bandy legs, burly arms, gleaming blue eyes, and tousled golden hair and beard.

"Who put that fine gulch in your nose, my lad? And what are you doing here, far away from the comfortable looting of Hadeland? I saw your ship come in, but did not dream whose it was. Is your wolf-pack hale and sound, and hungry as ever? You will find poor pickings here."

"I am here for the same reason that brought you, Kiotvi," the berserk replied, his eyes reddening at the mention of his disfigurement. "Harald made Norway too lively for me, as he did for you. Is Thorir Long-Chin here too?"

"Aye, and Soti of Rogaland, and Roald, King of Thelmark, to boot. They all got weary of waiting for Harald to come and

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get them; so as soon as Guthorm came hunting us, we stood him off just long enough to get our galleys ready, and then slipped away over the sea."

"Haki has been telling us how to take Paris," Onund broke in. "Doubtless he has some advice for you too."

Kiotvi's mouth widened in a cheerful grin.

"Is that so? What ought I to have done, Haki? You were a good Viking once, if you have been a bad berserk since."

Haki looked from Kiotvi to Onund, and back again, searching his cunning brain for the opening he wanted.

"Why," he said slowly, "as I told Onund, you should have made greater use of siege-engines. Oh, I know you did all that occurred to you, but you overlooked much more. I hear that you made a landing on the island. Why did you not storm the walls?"

"Look over at those walls, Haki," Kiotvi admonished him. "Note their height, picture yourself standing below them, with molten lead and fragments of brick and stone dropping down on you. Imagine arrows as big as javelins shot at you out of down-tilted engines, while you stand there gaping, wondering how you are ever to climb up. That is what beat us. We had no way to get at them, and they had too many ways of getting at us."

"Why did you not build catapults, and smash in the walls?"

"We built dozens of them, but could not get near enough for the stones we hurled to do damage. The river is wide."

"You should have brought up some of the lighter galleys," Haki expounded, "drawn them through that breach in the smaller bridge, floated them opposite the city wall, and set up your catapults in them."

Kiotvi sighed wearily.

"That breach was made after a fight that cost me six hundred good men. The day after it was made, the garrison, led by their earl, Odo the Falconer, sallied out, closed up the broken end of the bridge with masonry while they held us off with arrows, and established a line between the breach and the city. Their archers still command the breach. The trouble with you, Haki, is that you never had to fight a man like that Odo—unless it be Harald, and even he has not Odo's craft.

"Why, the man is so bold that he fills even the least of his townsfolk with his own fierce spirit. They fight like fiends. The river started that breach; we made it wider, and swarmed up as soon as it was open, set fire to the tower—which was of wood—by pushing up wagons filled with wood and straw, and waited for them to come out of the burning tower. They came soon enough; but what do you think they did first? Cut the tethers of their hunting-falcons, and let the birds fly to safety!

"They are good sportsmen, these Parisians. I had a falcon once—well, never mind. I would have spared their lives for that alone, especially since they expected we would hold them for ransom; but that German cut-throat Siegfried led the attack, and cut them all down without mercy.

"Two escaped immediate slaughter: one got his back against the burning tower, with brands falling all about him, and sent four good lads to Odin before he fell himself. The other peeled off his mail birnie and leaped into the river. We thought that would end him, but he swam to the island in a storm of arrows, and landed unhurt. The gods go with him for a brave man!"

"Why did you not press over at once? A boat or two, and a few planks, would have closed the gap."

"We tried that, and their arrows and catapults did the rest."

"I still hold," Haki maintained defiantly, "that a few of our own catapults mounted on ships of shallow draft——"

"They will not keep off the plague," Kiotvi answered solemnly.

Haki gasped.

"The plague!"

"Aye. Look yonder, no, there! Over on the city wall!"

The berserk looked, and saw a strange procession passing down the ramparts. He could see only part at a time, for the wall ran almost toward the portal where he sat. First came a band of noble Frankish warriors, huge men in splendid armor, walking slowly two by two.

"The man on the left, in boots of gilt leather, is Odo," Kiotvi explained.

There followed a tall old man in ecclesiastical vestments, his head bowed in prayer; Gauzelin, Bishop of Paris. Behind him came a score of lesser ecclesiastics and priests; the hindmost carried a long object of stone.

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"That stone box holds the bones of one of their holy ones," Kiotvi said. "Prisoners have told us it is St. Genevieve, whatever the name means. See the women in black raiment following it; they are praying to their cross, or mayhap to the holy one."

Borne on the wind, a sound of chanting came to them across the river and the fields. With heads bent in prayer, the supplicants implored the merciful help of the saint against the burning fever that raged within the walls.

Kiotvi was plainly frightened.

"That has been going on for a month now," he said. "They have the plague in there too; and they are making magic with the body of the dead holy one to draw the sickness out of the city into our camp. See how thick our tents dot the fields about the temple here? Every tenth tent has known death since that enchantment began."

Haki shivered, and drew a deep breath. His nostrils took in the stink of an unsanitated camp, the reek of filth and of loathsome death.

"Have you prayed to the gods?" he asked.

"Often. We have sacrificed grain, fruit, and cattle. The vineyards we captured were stripped of fruit, which is good to eat in sickness, and also pleasing for sacrifice; we took the countryfolk and such prisoners as we had made, and carried them with us to the assault, thinking that their deaths would be pleasing to Odin.

"We made a shield-wall on the bank of the moat, filled the moat with earth, branches, and bundles of faggots, and sacrificing horses and prisoners to the gods, we flung their bodies in after the faggots. Then we assailed. We did not even get across the moat. Odin has no eyes or ears for us; doubtless he is busy elsewhere."

Haki was silent for a long time. At last he asked—

"Have you won much booty?"

A grumbling murmur rose among the Northmen.

"Little," Kiotvi replied. "When we took this temple of the cross, we thought the roof-tiles were of gold. They looked golden. We stripped off every one, and found them but gilded copper. In the shrine at the end yonder we discovered a dozen stone chests, which looked as though they contained treasure.

"They turned out to be the coffins of ancient kings, with nothing but bones, half-rotten silk, and sweet-smelling herbs within. The men wanted to scatter the bones over the plain, and desecrate the chests; but I forbade them. Those dead kings were doubtless brave men once, like Odo; and for his sake I made our lads spare them."

Haki reflected, and his eyes grew small and cunning.

"Well," he observed, "I see little good in staying here, then. You can not fight the plague much longer, can you?"

KIOTVI cursed, gravely and deeply.

"By the entrails of Loki, no! Death walks in the wind. But it is hard to go with empty hands. Some of the men have been here two years and a half, and want something to show for it."

"Then why not send heralds to the townsfolk, offering to go if they pay a ransom?" Haki suggested.

Onund broke in, swearing eloquently.

"We have done just that," he shouted. "Last harvest-time came Karl, the fat emperor—may the Monster Snake tear his cowardly German hide—with a host, and camped on yonder hill across the river. He made loud boasts of what he would do to us if we did not leave. We drew up our companies ten deep all along this bank, and frightened him so that he offered to pay us twenty-thousand pounds of gold if we would depart, and promised also to let us ravage Burgundy. The white-livered dog! We accepted.

"Six days ago the ransom came. The command of our forces was for that day in the hands of Siegfried, the German pirate. Siegfried took the gold and put it in his camp, promising to divide it on the morrow. The next day we were up before dawn, every man itching for his share. And Siegfried, the son of a thief, was gone!

"Every man, every ship he had brought, gone! We raced down the river, but there was no sign of him. May every ounce of his ill-got treasure be a viper to sting him! May his sword fail at need, his shield be as paper, and his legs weak as water when the foemen come to tear his flesh!"

"And may his bones freeze in the Misty Hell!" Haki piously concluded. "Well, lads, I see no profit in this adventure, and plenty of wo, if you wait for the plague to end matters. Why not try something more profitable?"

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Kiotvi brought his fist down clanging on his shield.

"There is nothing better!" he exclaimed. "Ten years ago we might have gone to England and raided Wessex. Now Alfred the Saxon is king in South England; he has thrashed the Danes till they are almost ready to make peace, and he is too strong for us to handle. Moreover, the Danes skimmed the cream off Wessex before he smote them.

"Northumberland is friendly to us, and we are bound to leave it alone. Time was when there was good picking in Norway; but we have stripped the peasants bare, and Harald has thrown us out. The Franks have made Italy and Germany too hot to hold us. There is no good loot left!"

Softly and meditatively, Haki answered him.

"There is one good venture left," he announced. "There is one chance more for fair fighting and rich picking; and it happens that I can tell you where it is."

Kiotvi reached over and shook him by the shoulders.

"Tell us where it is, lad!" he urged. "Take us to it! So long as it is not guarded by stone walls, lead the way!"

"There will be hard blows to be had in the winning of it," Haki demurred.

"So much the better! We can fight well enough if there is gold to be had at the end of it!"

"You will need to go to Northumberland to refit first. Your ships will need overhauling, and you will want many arrows and throwing-spears. Also, you must get the soaking chill of the French rains out of your bones; for there will be occasion for every ounce of your strength."

"So be it!" Kiotvi declared. "There will be plenty of good lads in York who will be glad to join us. It was a good thing for us when Ragnarr Lodbrok's sons established a kingdom in Northumberland. Many a fine fellow has found refuge from Harald there."

"Well, this is the business, then," Haki explained, with a pretense at unwillingness. "You have said that Harald threw us out of Norway. When I left—somewhat swiftly—Harald was in Westfold. He will probably spend the Winter there. Solvi sends me word that Harald has a great treasure in Thrandheim, and probably another in Tunsberg. He has triumphed thus far because he has caught us one by one, and on land, where those of us that are Vikings fight at a disadvantage.

"He has a few ships—a hundred or two, I believe—but no great sea-strength. It is March now; if we come suddenly upon him in the Summer, we can overwhelm him easily. Why, you have over seven hundred ships here, enough to swamp him out! We will catch him with half his fleet in the North and half in the South, smash one squadron at a time, put him to a painful death, and divide his treasure between us."

Kiotvi fingered his beard.

"How do you know Harald's treasure is so great?" he questioned.

"Solvi told me. Did not Harald loot the hoard of every king in Thrandheim? Since then he has seized Hordaland, and stripped that. Perhaps he found a few baubles of yours in Agdir, Kiotvi."

Kiotvi growled.

"What makes you such a friend of Solvi's?" he asked suspiciously. "I thought you and he were at odds."

"We both hate Harald," Haki answered.

"Nor do I understand your hatred for Harald," the other persisted. "You were anybody's man that could buy you. Why did you not sell out to Harald?"

"There are private matters between us that make friendship impossible," Haki replied.

"And I will tell you what they are," a deep voice boomed from within the abbey.

Soti, King of Rogaland, came forward, pointing one finger at the berserk.

"You, Haki, brought about the death of Harald's father. Vengeance must be taken for that. Then you cast eyes on a maid that Harald wanted, threatening to carry her off; and Harald does not forgive that. Oh, we may trust Haki well enough. Not a man of us hates the cub of Westfold half as much as he."

Haki turned an inscrutable eye on Soti.

"What raven whispered that in your ear?" he asked.

"It is common talk in the North," the other replied. "I am surprised Kiotvi had not heard of it. It is even rumored that the maid had something to do with that scar on your neck."

Haki rose, walked forward till he stood quite close to Soti, and thrust his face within an inch of the other's eyes.

"You say truly that I am to be trusted,"

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he said, slowly and menacingly; "but if you ever breathe a word of the maid again, or hint that such a one lives, the raven that told you the tale shall pick your bones!"

Soti was silent.

Kiotvi held out both hands.

"Well, lads," he began. "In this hand I hold sickness and useless slaughter; in that I hold wealth and vengeance. I think the last is best. What do you say?"

"I agree, for one," Onund declared. "Let us go to York, refit as soon as may be, and sail for Norway! I have my eyes on a pretty bit of Thrandheim."

Sulkily, Soti came forward.

"I do not like Haki's temper," he said; "but neither do I like his sword-edge. Let us accept his plan."

"And you, Roald?" Kiotvi's face was quite eager as he asked the question.

The broken King of Thelmark, leaning against one of the mighty marble columns, nodded slowly.

"Anything," he answered, "to put Harald where he belongs."

"Then it is settled. Get along, all of you, and gather your men. We will break camp at dark, steal down the river to the ships, and sail at dawn. No use giving these Parisians a chance to laugh at us. In the Summer, lads, in the Summer! In three months we shall be kings again, and shall drink deep of wealth and vengeance!"

The shout that followed rolled out over the waters of the Seine to the city, where the men and women praying on the walls heard it, and trembled for the last time. In the morning they were to look for the tents of the pirates in vain, and would raise their songs of thanksgiving to St. Genevieve. But they would not think to thank Haki.

CHAPTER XX

HAFRSFJORD

IN HIS expectation that Harald would stay on at Westfold, Haki was wrong. Well aware that Kiotvi and the other predatory chiefs he had driven out would seize the first fair opportunity for revenge, and guessing that Haki, whom his ambassador sent to secure the berserk alive or dead had failed to find in Sweden, had sailed for some Viking rendezvous, the king resolved to lose no time in putting Norway in a state of defense.

During the fair Spring months Thrandheim was in such a fever of preparation as it had never known before. The armies that had been three years in the making were now ready to be poured into the field, or embarked on the mighty fleet whose lithe hulls rested on the waters of every fjord and harbor from Ladir to Oslo.

Every one, that is, except Hardanger Fjord; for that was in Gunnhild's territory, and Harald had no wish to lean on her strength. By the end of May, the four hundred ships he had planned for were nearly all built, and the host was ready to sail at a moment's notice: ready to the last man, the last arrow-head, the last rivet. Every galley stood waiting and ready, with provisions for a month's voyage.

All Norway had responded to the call for men. Fifty thousand, mostly trained warriors, were to form the fighting force of the fleet; twenty thousand more, summoned from the fields and mountain-pastures, were being taught to form shield-walls, to advance in wedge-formation, in squares, and in the old-fashioned triple line. Entrenching they did not need to learn; it had been practised in every clan feud and sectional war that had been waged within the memory of man, and the sturdy farmers and mountaineers had dug themselves in again and again in the past against marauding bands.

Eating a late supper one evening at the end of May, after a strenuous day spent in watching the Orkdale contingent at war-maneuvers, Harald was interrupted by an officer of house-carles.

"Sigvald, brother of Rognvald of the Meres, is in the court," the officer reported," with an ill-looking fellow in chains. Sigvald has important news for the king's ear."

"Bid him come in," Harald ordered; and a moment later the two entered.

Sigvald was about five or six and twenty, with the body of a young giant. Everything about him seemed to stick out; his muscles stood out like knobs, his forehead bulged, his jaw jutted, his cheek-bones showed like ledges below his protruding eyes; and his very voice burst upon the ears like a sudden peal of thunder.

The man with him was a wretched spectacle; bruised, scratched, and ragged, muddy and forlorn; he looked as if an avalanche had played with him.

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Disregarding his subordinate's resonant greeting, Harald fixed him with a cold stare.

"You should be in Raum," he said frigidly, "with your company. What are you doing here?"

Sigvald stared at him.

"Why, look you," he replied, "there are things that matter more than orders. I have learned news that will send every man and ship south as fast as sails and oars permit. Does the king care to hear the plans of his enemies?"

Harald's eyes lost their frigidity, and grew large and fierce.

"Speak," he commanded. "Some things do matter more than orders, and I am glad that my officers know that much. Still, if your news should not be worth the disobedience——"

"You shall judge," Sigvald replied. "This rat here—" and he shook the wretched prisoner beside him—"is one of Kiotvi's men, whom I captured on the border of Raum and North Mere. He would not speak at first, but I argued with him; and now he is ready to talk. Will you hear him?"

Harald signed for the man to speak; and with much prompting and prodding, speak he did, to good effect.

"Kiotvi sent me," he began, "to get word to Solvi Klofi of the attack intended this Summer."

"This Summer?" Harald interrrupted. "When, where, and in what force?"

"The main force will reach Hafrsfjord within three weeks," the prisoner answered. "It is planned that we shall wait for your fleet and destroy it before marching inland. Kiotvi Soti of Rogaland, Onund Thick-neck, Roald of Thelmark, and Thorir Long-Chin, the pirate, lead the squadrons. There are scarce less than seven hundred and fifty ships, with seventy men to a ship."

The king hummed softly to himself, and played with a lock of his long yellow hair.

"Is Haki with them?" he asked thoughtfully.

"He is. It was he who persuaded the chiefs to undertake the venture."

"And what part does Solvi play in all this?"

"It was known that he was still hiding in the Meres, with the remnants of his following; that he hates you, and is the best swordsman in the North."

"Did you reach him before Sigvald laid hands on you?"

"Aye. He sailed for the South three days ago. He has but one ship, but it is well loaded with berserks and outlaws."

"That is all," Harald answered. "You have saved your life, fellow; and you shall remain in my hands till the battle is over. Take care of him, Sigvald; and mind you do not preach your own views on orders to the men. For this day's work you shall have a ship of your own."

Well pleased, Sigvald marched off with his prisoner.

Then, to all appearances, confusion broke loose. Companies were routed out of their quarters and marched down to the beach, where a hasty embarkation was begun. Officers scurried about from camp to waterfront and back, getting the last things on board, looking after the accommodations of their men, directing the excited warriors to their ships.

One contingent after another was massed along the shore, where they waited for definite orders; and when these orders came, they would be haled off a league or two to the north, or sent off on long marches to some Southern port, where their ships were waiting. Mounted troops dashed in relays from one district to the next; and whenever they stopped, great masses of men were set in motion toward the sea, where the long galleys tugged at their anchors. Spear-points glittered on every road, snakey wagon-trains, rumbling and creaking, rolled down to the ships.

But in all and over all, the hand of Harald guided, directed, and marshaled. The seeming disorder was really the highest perfection of order; each company knew the name of its ship, and each ship awaited its company in the nearest available port. Every officer knew just what was expected of him; and as soon as the order came, hastened to carry it out. And all this machinery was set in motion in spite of the fact that Harald had only the doubtful word of a captured spy to go on.

Harald himself was on the shore, waiting for the long-boat from the *Midgard Serpent*, when definite confirmation came. A troop of horsemen rode down to the shore, leaped from their saddles, and stood at attention before the king.

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"Well?" he questioned.

Their officer touched his sword-hilt deferentially.

"The Queen of Hordaland sends greetings to Harald the King, and bids me say that within three weeks a fleet of Vikings will appear at Hafrsfjord, coming from England. They number more than seven hundred ships."

Harald took a heavy leathern purse from his girdle, and handed it to the officer.

"How did Queen Gunnhild learn of this?" he asked.

"Kolbeinn the Bear captured one of their messengers, who was trying to stir up the peasants to rebellion. He was taken before the queen, and under Kolbeinn's hands confessed."

"What was done with him?"

"He perished, having attempted to stab Kolbeinn,"

Harald smiled.

"Give my thanks to your queen," he said, "and tell her that I will meet the Vikings at Hafrsfjord."

He stepped into the boat, and the oarsmen pushed off.

WHERE the peninsula of Stavanger, pointing due north, separates the open sea from the isle-strewn waters of the Boknfjord, three long jagged tongues of land split off from the western face of Stavanger, running out into deep water. The midmost of these tongues is shorter than the others; which bend mutually toward it, forming a mouth. This mouth, together with the narrow waters between the outer tongues and the central sand-spit, forms the Hafrsjord.

Here, in two squadrons, sixty long-ships waited news of the Viking fleet which, somewhere beyond the horizon, was racing toward Rogaland. Hidden behind the peninsula of Stavanger, two hundred and forty more lay in ambush, their carven figure-heads fixed in perpetually menacing grimaces, their fighting-rooms filled with impatient warriors. Between fjord and sea, at the tip of the peninsula, the *Midgard Serpent* watched.

Harald had staked all on this one battle. Every ship he could muster—fifty fine dragon-ships, stationed far to the southeast near the Weather Isles, could not be reached in the short time at his disposal—lay in and about Hafrsfjord, with the exception of thirty fast cruising galleys, which lay out to sea directly in the path of the Vikings.

Six days had they waited. The wind blew from the southeast, and the enemy, they knew, was eating up the miles between England and Norway. Every man was eager for the issue, confident of the outcome. The leadership of Harald had never been so sure, so trust-inspiring. The whole fleet looked to him, certain that he would lead them to victory.

It was dawn on the seventh day when Thorhall, watching on the fore-deck of the *Midgard Serpent*, saw the flutter of sails to the westward.

"They come!" he cried, fairly dancing with impatience.

The king leaped up beside him, looked out, and shook his head.

"It is our scouts," he said. "But the Vikings will not be far behind, if Guthorm has obeyed his orders."

Seizing his horn, he blew two blasts; and a shout went up from the eager crew. One after another, two red shields rose to the *Serpent's* mast-head; the ships hidden behind Stavanger saw, and their captains shouted orders to their men. Oars were run out, and the leather thongs fastened over the thole-pins.

The sixty great galleys on the Hafrsfjord also saw. Twenty waited in battle-line on each side of the sand-spit; twenty more stretched out across the mouth, but leaving a space at either end of the line.

Throughout the fleet, the fighting-men gathered in the rooms between the rowing-benches, flocked to the wide spaces aft of the fore-decks and about the masts, and bunched together on both decks. From the open chests thick bundles of arrows were passed to the archers; swords were drawn, spear-points flashed in the sun.

The distant sails grew larger, drew together, and came on swiftly. A moment more, and the warriors could make out the graceful hulls and the monstrous figure-heads of their own light squadron, tearing over the sea toward safety.

A roar of hate and battle-lust rose from twelve thousand throats. Behind the racing long-ships sail after sail sprang up over the horizon in endless multitude; hull after hull sprang into sight, squat and threatening.

Like frightened birds the swift cruisers

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dashed toward the ends of the battle-line, sails flapping and dropping to the decks. In a smother of foam they turned, one after the other, and took their places in the long array: done with fleeing, and ready to turn and rend their pursuers. Here and there a ship fouled with its neighbor; but with skill and speed the seamen freed them, and each reached its station safely.

Not a moment too soon; for with beating oars and the rattle of spars the Vikings came on, lowering sail at the half-mile, and racing for the first blow at the freedom of the North. Each pirate galley struck as it came, without waiting for its consorts.

It was well for Norway that her king had been wise enough to discard old methods and build his ships for size and capacity. Each one of them, with its high sides and its two hundred eager warriors, was a floating fortress. The ships of the Vikings, lower and smaller, held no more than seventy men each. Of these, thirty were needed at the oars; while Harald's long-ships, requiring sixty or more to row, could still spare one hundred and forty each for active fighting.

The effective force of the two fleets, therefore, was thirty thousand for the pirates, and fully forty thousand for Harald. This superiority might even compensate for his inferiority in weight and tonnage. It was no light thing to oppose seven hundred and fifty ships with three hundred dragons and thirty cruisers.

Solitary, majestic, the *Midgard Serpent* bore down between the pirates and the Norwegian line, until she lay alone a cable's length ahead of her sisters. With short, throaty yells, the berserks flung themselves upon her. Perhaps seventy of the Viking ships had now come up; two shot forward, ran alongside, grappled, and strove to draw themselves close to her broadsides.

The pirate crews lined their gunwales, brandishing swords and axes; the Thrandheim men thrust their long oars against their adversaries' hulls, and held them off. With the unison of men who know their work, the crews of the galleys just behind threw their grapples aboard the pirates and the *Serpent* too; then they hauled at the ropes with might and main, till the three engaged ships yielded, and were drawn back to the main Norwegian line.

At a signal from Harald, the *Serpent's* rowers drew in their oars, seized shields from the gunwales and swords from the benches beside them, and threw themselves against the boarding pirates. The struggle was short and sharp. The thirty rowers on each side, together with the overwhelming numbers of the men-at-arms, gave the *Serpent* an immense advantage. The pirates recoiled before their strokes, leaped back into their own ships, and strove to cast off. In vain!

As fast as their swords shore through the cables, fresh grapples were thrown; and Harald's men, with shouts of triumph, boarded both of their foes simultaneously. A few moments of desperate fighting, and they had cleared the main-room about the mast, drove the savagely fighting berserks into the narrower spaces forward and aft, and cut them down as butchers cut down cattle in the pens. When all was done, and the two attacking galleys were floating shambles, the Thrandheimers returned to their own craft and cast off, ready for the next assault.

In the mean time the rest of the pirate squadron flung itself upon Harald's outer line, cutting between the long-ships and making fast as the first two had done. Outweighed and outnumbered, they were paying the penalty of their rash attack when, with wild shouts and the splashing pound of many oars, a second squadron dashed up and closed. Not one of Harald's first line now but was surrounded with hostile ships, tugged at and torn as elk are torn by the swift, circling rush of wolves.

The Viking galleys took no heed of wind or wave; reckless of the shock, they surged in, discharging arrows and striking with long spears. Smashed up against their heavier opponents by the wind and sea, and the impetus of their own rush, no less than seven recoiled with gaping seams, through which the seas poured. Yelling with frenzy, undaunted by weapons, the berserks leaped from their ships aboard the tall dragons, cutting and stabbing.

The men of Thrandheim defended themselves well, hastily regrouping to meet this unexpected form of attack. The bowmen ran from the waists, where the fighting was thickest, to the fore and after decks, whence they poured in volley after volley on the maddened pirates; the spearmen ranged themselves in the holds between the decks and the archers, stabbing over the heads of the swordsmen with their long

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weapons; while the fight raged fiercely in the waists with sword and ax.

AND now, driving on with all speed, a vast multitude of Viking craft appeared to the westward, fully three hundred ships, stretching over a huge line in several squadrons. The southernmost squadron flew a red banner striped with broad bars of gold, the standard of Kiotvi the Wealthy; directly north of him the oars of Soti of Thelmark churned the waves; next to him came the stout ships of Roald and the flaunting green pennants of Onund Thick-Neck, feared and hated by honest merchantmen; the northernmost squadron flew the black banner of Thorir Long-Chin.

Two ships rode by themselves on the extreme left wing, unmarked by any sign or token; and the angry Thrandheimers knew that these were the accursed galleys of Haki and Solvi the Butcher.

On came that terrible line, nearer and nearer: the bright shields glittered on their bulwarks; the gaping figure-heads seemed to clash their wooden jaws threateningly; the wolf-coated berserks whose weapons gleamed on high shouted in triumph, and clanged their swords against the iron bosses of their shields. Already fighting for their lives with the first and second squadrons, the king's men had little leisure to heed the new attack until it was upon them.

But Harald saw. After destroying the two ships that had closed with him first, he compelled his crew to row to the northern end of the fjord, under the shelter of the promontory of Randberg, and there, his lee side safe, stood off a second attack with a steady succession of arrow-flights. Not until the main fleet of the pirates came within range did he choose to mingle in the fight again; then, with a loud, triple blast on his war-horn, he drew out from the promontory, allowing two of Thorir's fleet to close with him.

Hearing his signal, the struggling Thrandheim crews managed to increase the distance between one another, permitting the wave of pirate-galleys to engulf them, envelop them, and break through. Then, with the quick uptake of oar-blades, the second and third lines of the royal fleet drew up from the two channels of the fjord, caught the assailants between their weight and the already engaged first line, grappled, and poured their boarders over the gunwales to port and starboard.

Soti's squadron, darting rashly ahead, was ground between the second and third lines, swept over by the enraged Norwegians, and gutted. Disengaging, the victorious royalists closed next with Roald of Thelmark. Now the battle was fiercer, as the press of the main Viking fleet made itself felt.

Arrows flew in dense clouds, stripping the whole side of ship after ship, or quivering in the wooden sides; broad spear-blades tore through the rings of steel birnies; heavy axes, wielded by the sinewy arms of pirates and the hardened men of Guthorm's veterans, clove through shield, helmet, and skull. But in spite of the advantage of position, of seamanship, and of able command, the sixty brave galleys were hard put to it to hold their own.

Gradually the Vikings worked free of the crush into which their first recklessness had carried them, re-formed, and fell upon the devoted Thrandheimers from every side. Overwhelmed by sheer numbers—for, grappled and boarded in turn, they were swept by thousands of bloodthirsty sea-thieves—they ceased to cooperate, and fought singly, with arms that grew ever wearier. It was of no avail to repel, to annihilate the assailants; fresh pirate craft came up, fresh boarders swarmed over the sides.

Then Harald sprang his trap. At a preconcerted signal, the two hundred and forty long-ships which had hidden behind Stavanger rowed proudly, steadily, out from ambush, and flung themselves upon the Vikings' rear. Hafrsfjord was now one welter of struggling, colliding ships; the little bay, on both sides of the spit, was fairly jammed with the fighting navies. A man might almost walk from one end of the battle to the other, leaping from galley to galley.

So soon as a ship was stripped, the victors rushed over its side to the next, and started the combat anew. It was all a vast riot and confusion; ever and again, moving from one to another of the intertangled vessels, a crew would find itself in the midst of a nest of enemies, separated from their own ship by three or four bloody hulks.

Just as the relief came up, more sails floated into sight against the western sky. Harald saw them; and cursing aloud, he

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flung himself against the steering-oar, calling on his rowers to bring the *Serpent* alongside the galley of Rognvald, who led the newly-arrived relief. Rognvald ran aft, cupped one hand about his ear, and received the king's command.

He nodded, shouted to the captain of the nearest ship; and from one galley to another the order was passed down the line. Swinging in to the attack, the fresh galleys grappled; one hundred and fifty men from each ship swarmed aboard the pirate galleys, which were now packed like herring in a school, and fifty more remained behind to hold the long-ships against the assault which impended from the west.

The fresh forces temporarily turned the scale. Caught between two fires, the squadrons of Roald and Kiotvi were riddled with arrows, decimated with the thrusts of long spears, and cut down at close quarters like sheep. They had no choice but to retreat; and there was only one place to retreat to, the expectant decks of Harald's bleeding but undaunted crews behind.

Kiotvi fought like a hero of ancient legend. He gathered a handful of his axmen about him in a shield-wall; and it went hard with any loyal Norwegian who approached that circle of steel. The hold about them was piled deep with corpses; their weapons were red with blood that dripped down their arms and stained their mail. Their arms were weary; but they fought on with gallant courage, and held their own.

Then Harald urged the *Midgard Serpent* into the press. There was none to interfere with her, for every crew was hotly engaged, and none cared to undertake the boarding of a galley which contained two hundred fresh warriors. His crew, following his shouted orders, pushed out with oars and hands against the sides of the ships which blocked their advance.

Slowly, painfully, they drove their way through the jam till the fine ship was square between the galleys of Onund Thick-Neck and Thorir Long-Chin. Here the fight was at its hottest, for Onund and Thorir were both champions, men of abnormal strength and able leadership; and each had crews of picked berserks.

Onund gave a loud shout when he recognized his new antagonist.

"To me, lads!" he shouted. "Here is rich picking!" and at the head of twenty berserks, he essayed to board.

Thorhall rushed forward to meet him, while the *Serpent's* port fore-room men stood by with twelve-foot spears. The venture was too much even for Onund, but he would not recognize it. With a panther-like leap, he broke through the defenders, catching the opposing spears on his shield, and throwing the weight of his tremendous body forward till he crashed through the line.

Thorhall brought his sword down full on Onund's head; but the pirate's helmet withstood the blow; and his whirling ax bit through the treble rings over Thorhall's shoulder, and tore off the unfortunate man's arm. With a groan of agony, Thorhall sank to the deck.

Before Onund could take advantage of his success, Harald was upon him, his sword uplifted. Onund parried the blow, but a spear wielded by a sturdy housecarle of Westfold darted at his throat, in dodging which he stepped back, leaving his right leg out-thrust and unguarded. Putting every ounce of his strength into the swing, Harald cut at the leg, and severed it at the knee. Onund fell back into the arms of the berserks; and these, giving way before the onrush of Harald's men, carried their mangled leader back into his own ship.

The king's crew followed hot at their heels, cutting and stabbing. Back to the further gunwale the pirates retreated, over it, and into the next ship, where Kiotvi the Wealthy was making his stand. Here the retreat ended; the berserks joined themselves to Kiotvi's shield-wall, and stood off the assailants. Harald ordered his men back, returned to the *Serpent*, and ordered the starboard company over the side against Thorir Long-Chin.

THE diversion was necessary. Thorir, against more than his weight of the king's men, had made a breach in the defending line and was about to board. The war-cry of the *Serpent's* crew recalled him. Facing his men about swiftly, he awaited Harald's attack. There was no room for spears now. The two crews hurtled together in grim silence, every man bent on the destruction of his immediate opponent. For half an hour the battle swayed to and fro, until nearly half the men were down on both sides.

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At last Thorir succeeded in fighting his way through to the king, and struck the shield out of Harald's hand at the first blow. With clenched lips, Harald closed with him, slashing furiously. Again and again the pirate chief broke through his guard, but the good mail saved the king's life. Breathing hard, Harald fought on furiously. His eyes never left those of Thorir; he seemed unable to lose sight of that strong, savage face, till the hot blue eyes and the long, stubborn chin seemed to madden him.

At last, for the fraction of a second, Thorir left his head unguarded. Harald thrust with the point, ripped the hateful chin from lip to beard, and threw the pirate back staggering. With one tremendous blow, Harald ended the matter. Thorir's shattered skull crashed against the deck. With a howl of dismay, his men flung themselves over the gunwale—and into the sea.

The churning mass of hulks had drifted apart, or been pushed aside by some concerted movement of the battle, and left a stretch of red-streaked water, in which the pirates' heads bobbed and sank.

Again the scale turned. At the fall of their sturdiest champion, the Vikings were filled with terror. On ship after ship they weakened, faltered, and broke. Harald's men, emboldened as the pirates lost heart, swept them to destruction. Galley after galley was cleared and thrust aside with oars and boat-hooks, till there was once more a clear channel down the fjord.

But in the hour of the Vikings' utmost need, new champions arose. The rear-guard of their fleet, sweeping up against the undermanned galleys of Rognvald, foamed over the sides, where they met men as strong and eager as themselves. For a long time the king's men had the better of it; but at length Haki and Solvi, rallying the disconcerted pirates, hurled themselves on the defenders, and cleared ten ships in succession.

Solvi in particular fought with irresistible force. His sword seemed invincible, his arm untiring. Man after man went down before him, till the mere sight of his dripping blade drove the Thrandheimers in terror before him.

Down the newly cleared channel came the *Midgard Serpent* again, bringing fresh hope to the stricken warriors. As he had driven his ship between Onund's and Thorir's, so now Harald urged her between the galleys of Haki and Solvi. The seven-score men still unhurt aboard her lined both gunwales, awaiting the command to board.

Harald looked from one of his enemies to the other, his personal hate for Haki, and the remembrance of his father's murder, struggling against his knowledge that Solvi was the more dangerous foe. At last he decided, and joining the starboard boarding party, leaped over the side into Solvi's ship.

The onrush of his swordsmen drove back the pirates to the waist, where they made a determined stand. Solvi himself, his back to the mast, waited, lashing out from behind his shield at any who dared approach him. Man after man went down before him; berserk after berserk fell before Harald's onslaught, till at last Solvi and the king stood face to face. With the spring of a wolf, the Butcher leaped at Harald, his sword flashing in circles about the king's head. The two men fought with savage fury, the remembrance of their former combat lending vigor to their strokes.

In the midst of the struggle, there rose a confused outcry, the sound of many men in fear and wonder. Straight from the north, past the island of Outstone—where Harald had built a hall to house him between the voyages to the North—forty fine galleys rowed swiftly toward the mouth of the Hafrsfjord.

In column they came; on the fore-deck of the first stood Kolbeinn the Bear, and beside him, clad in gleaming mail, bare-headed, her glorious hair floating in the wind—a woman, beautiful as the Goddess Freyja! In her right hand she held a bow, and her fine eyes swept the fighting fleets.

"A Valkyr!" quavered the frightened warriors. "A Valkyr, sent by Odin to slay!"

Panic terror reigned in both fleets. Only those men who had been to Westfold with Harald, and only Haki and Solvi the Butcher, were undismayed. Confusion followed; in their frantic haste to get away before the messenger of the gods claimed them, the hostile crews rowed, pushed, clawed their way toward the land, bumping and colliding at every stroke.

Then, as the panic reached its height, the

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wondrous woman raised her bow, and fitted an arrow to the string.

Bent on ending it, Solvi redoubled his strokes, with no attempt to parry those Harald plied him with. Once and again the king thrust; the second stroke scratched Solvi's cheek, and he dropped his guard. Harald raised his sword to give the final blow, slipped in a pool of blood, and fell heavily on the deck.

With a shout of triumph, Solvi brandished his blade in both hands, uncovering his chest. Just as the blow was descending, there was an angry hum, a clang of steel on steel, and Solvi, dropping his weapon, reeled and fell headlong, the feathered end of an arrow protruding from the mail above his heart. The Butcher was dead.

And the fleet of Gunnhild, built in secret for her lover's need, swept down upon his terror-stricken foes. With the discharge of her arrow and the fall of their champion, the pirates, pale and babbling with terror, threw themselves into the sea, or submitted tamely to the death-stroke. The new reenforcements ended the battle.

Only two ships still maintained the Viking cause. Kiotvi the Wealthy, shouting frantic orders to his broken shield-wall, cut his way through the assailants, leaped from ship to ship till he reached the shore, and fled swiftly, almost alone, over the coast of Jadar into the interior. Haki, quite aware that his new enemy was no Valkyr, but a mortal woman, resolved in his evil heart that if she were lost to him, Harald should not win her, and urged his scared crew, with threats and curses, to attack her galley.

But his men were deaf to his angry orders, and strove frantically to break through the fast encircling line of ships. At last, sweeping between two of the Hordaland galleys, they won free, carrying the enraged berserk against his will to the safety of the open sea. In helpless fury he shook his fist at the ships of Gunnhild, and through snarling lips he screamed—

"I shall return, sweet lady!"

With shouts of triumph, the rescued sailors of the royal fleet and the rescuing crews pursued the fugitives. Such of the Vikings as had not fled, found an eternal refuge in the sea; or, fallen earlier in the fight, were surrounded and cut to pieces. The power of the rebels was broken forever. Gunnhild the Queen had placed the crown of Norway on Harald's head.

CHAPTER XXI

THE ROAD TO PEACE

Hast heard how at Hafrsfjord hardily battled
Our king the king-mighty with Kiotvi the Wealthy?
Came from the West the ships combat-greedy,
With great gaping heads and gay-graven stem-posts,

Burdened with battlers and bright-gleaming war-shields,
With Western spears laden, and swords of the sun-setting;
Loud howled the berserks, war hovered o'er them;
Yelled the wolf-coated, clashed they the iron.

The swift strokes of Harald they tested; he smote them,
Our High-King of Northmen, hasting from Outstone.
The Viking-chiefs shifted their ship-steads before him:
Loud clanged the shield-rims, till Long-Chin was shattered.

King Thick-Neck lusted to win our land-holdings,
But Harald the Gold-Haired with sorrow harrassed him,
Below the wet deck-planks the pirates dived wounded,
Their tails lifted upward, their heads to the keel turned.

On their backs, fear-maddened, sore battered with weapons,
They slung their bright shields, such as lived to seek shelter;
The sea-thieves sped flitting and fled over Jadar,
Far from the fjord, craving beer more than battle.

The slain lay sand-strewing, spoil for Odin the One-Eyed,
For Frigg's godlike spouse. Such fierce deeds delight us!

THUS sang Hornklofi at the king's feast. Harald leaped to his feet, unclasped the furred crimson cloak from his shoulders, and fastened it about the poet's neck. Gunnhild too, unpinning her enameled golden brooch, rose, and fixed it to the folds of the cloak with which the king had honored Hornklofi.

"If Harald will spare you," she laughed, "you must come often to Hordaland. I will give you ale enough to swim in, if it inspires you to make songs like this."

His eyes suddenly fierce, Hornklofi raised the jewelled gift to his lips.

"You are too generous," he answered. "I thank you for your offer; but the gods decree that it is safest for me to bide with the king."

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And the company, unknowing and uncaring what these things meant, shouted and stamped their applause of the poet's verse and the generosity of the great.

When the house-carles had been dismissed, and the chiefs were departing to their quarters, Harald grasped Gunnhild's hand, and detained her. His eyes were troubled.

"What did you mean, heart's desire," he asked, "when you bade Hornklofi to visit you in Hordaland? You are not going back to Hordaland; you are mine now, and remain with me."

Gunnhild turned her frank eyes to him, her face at once radiant with love and tender with pity.

"Not yet," she said. "Not yet. You made a vow, Harald, which must be kept first of all."

"Is it not kept?" he protested. "All Norway is mine, as I swore it should be. Today's battle — thanks to your brave heart and steady hand—broke the power of my enemies forever. I am now king of a strong, united land. What else remains?"

Gunnhild sighed.

"Suppose harm should come to you?" she asked. "Suppose treachery or storm should overwhelm you? Before the people were done quarreling over your successor, the news of your death would go out over all the North, even to England, whither the remnant of the Vikings have fled, and where sea-thieves infest the Scottish Isles, and they would fall upon the leaderless land. Or if you live, they will rally from this stroke, and joined by malcontents who can not bear law and discipline, they will hurl themselves upon the unprotected South while you are far away in Thrandheim.

"Harald, this country of ours will never know peace and security until the pirate lairs in the West are broken up forever, their cities in England and Scotland reduced, and the last of their chiefs punished. You alone can do this, and you must do it —at once. Bleeding from wounds inflicted during hundreds of years of strife, this Norway of ours cries to you for rest and peace!"

Harald turned away, and paced restlessly up and down. At last, turning sharply upon her, he said:

"You are right; but must I wait for you till it is done? Think of the long years I have hoped and planned and fought for you! Think of the waiting, the longing in my heart! When shall I have my reward for it all?"

Laying her head on his arm, she drew him to her, and clasped him 'round the neck.

"As much as I can reward you, you shall be rewarded," she assured him. "But your real reward will be the joy of knowing that you have made your country great, free, and happy; that men, women, and little children bless your name, and pray the gods to endow you with every happiness! That should strengthen your heart and steel your courage, regardless of me.

"So, let me leave you now, with this thought in both our hearts: you are going away on your last great venture, to strike the final blow for Norway and for me; and I wait for you at home, confident of the outcome, with love unutterable in my heart. When you return, come straight to me. I shall be in Ringariki, for it is long since I have seen my foster-father, and he is lonely for me. When you come, I will keep you waiting no longer."

Harald tried to speak, but the words choked in his throat. He kissed her, and hurried from the room.

THE second morning saw a mighty fleet sailing westward over the sea toward England. Foremost of all, plowing powerfully through the water, the *Midgard Serpent* reared her spray-splashed head.

CHAPTER XXII

THE RED HANDS OF LOVE

THE news of Hafrsfjord spread through Norway like wildfire. So terrible had been the overthrow of the Vikings that every man who had taken up arms against Harald fled over the sea, fearing lest the king should hunt him down. But swiftly as they fled, they were not so swift as Harald, whose long-ships scoured the British Isles for them.

One calm, soft night in the following Summer, Haki and his wild crew of broken men appeared again in his old lair of Hadeland. Roused from sleep by the noise of their arrival, Thora groped her way to the bower-door, and came face to face with the berserk himself. He was fearfully worn

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by fatigue, and half-mad with despair.

Thora, too wise to refer to his defeat at Hafrsfjord, greeted him with dissembled delight, and did not lose a moment in preparing such food as there was for him and his wolfish followers. After he had eaten and slept, he was ready to talk. His red eyes shifted furtively, as if death lurked in every corner.

"I have come back, girl, to die in my hole," he told her. "After the battle I made for Scotland as fast as wind and oars could urge me, thinking to find refuge there. I had just made myself snug in Caithness, and was doing well at piracy in a quiet way, when one fine day I sailed 'round Dunnet Head fair into the midst of Harald's fleet. The gods curse him!

"If it had not been for wind and current, which favored me, his teeth would have closed on me. I won clear in the nick of time. How closely he followed me I know not, but there is no safety here. He will be back all too soon; his armies will scour the land, his ships sweep the sea for me."

"Could you not have found safety in Ireland?" Thora questioned.

"I tried that, only to be chased away by Rognvald, whom Harald has left in charge of the Isles. I might have got to Iceland; but I have a score to settle here, and I will settle it, if it costs me my life. Sigurd Stag once refused me the hand of his foster-daughter Gunnhild, whom Harald loves. I have come back to kill the old dotard, and to carry her off, if she is with him. Once she is in my hands, I shall take a full and sweet revenge on Harald."

Suddenly there flashed into Thora's mind the scene between Gunnhild and Haki in Westfold, when he had paid for his discovery of her with a stab in the throat. She recalled also Solvi's raid on Sigurd's hall, and the reason for all these things was clear. So it was for love of Gunnhild that Haki had discarded her! The knowledge of this could be made to serve her vengeance too. Let Gunnhild fall into the berserk's power, and the proud woman should suffer deeply for her scorn of Thora.

"She is staying with Sigurd now," Thora said, her voice vibrant with hate. "You will never have a better chance."

"I gambled on it," Haki rejoined, "though I feared she would be in Hordaland. I may not live long after Harald returns, but I will snatch what happiness I can in the meantime. Call Sveinn the Red, and bid him prepare for a march and a fight tomorrow."

SIGURD STAG spurred his horse between the long avenues of pines, scanning the needled forest floor for the track of his quarry. He had roused a fine buck a few miles to the south, and made a poor cast with his hunting-spear, leaving the shaft sticking in the frightened creature's rump. Straight into the heart of the forest it fled, and hotly Sigurd pursued it. Now out of sight, it was still traceable by the ever-increasing trail of blood on the pine-needles.

In his right hand Sigurd held a second javelin ready for the moment when he should come up with his prey; a short, heavy hunting-sword hung by his side. His woolen cloak was his only protection; since he had repulsed Solvi's attack, the entire region had been rid of the berserks that once scourged it, and there was no further need to wear armor when one went hunting.

Suddenly he stiffened. Directly ahead, not sixty yards off, the exhausted buck lay prone on the earth, half-behind a mighty pine. The sunlight filtering down in little flecks and splashes through the branches made such a dappled pattern on the brown pine-needles as to afford the dappled deer perfect concealment, so that he had not noticed it till now. Sigurd rode swiftly forward, poising the javelin for a cast.

But the quarry, sensing its enemy with ear and nostril, staggered to its feet and limped away. As he drew nearer, fear lent strength to its trembling legs, and it bounded off in one last, heart-breaking dash for life. And Sigurd dashed after, eyes straining to follow it. Urging his horse as fast as it was safe to go over the slippery needles, through brightening forest-aisles into a little glade.

A shout rang out; a host of figures leaped up and ran toward him. Dazzled for a moment by the bright sunshine, Sigurd still knew that these could be no friends. As they drew around him, he glanced rapidly from one wild face to another; then, recognizing them for thieves, if not worse, he turned to his horse to flee. A throwing-spear whizzed through the air; he felt his horse stagger, and leaped from the saddle just in time to avoid falling with it.

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Now flight was impossible; he turned to face his enemies, and his eyes rested on the distorted, grinning face of Haki. He raised his hand in a gesture of peace, seeking time for a parley.

"It is death," Haki said through twisted lips. "I made you a fair offer once, and you refused it. Now you must pay."

Sigurd looked unflinchingly into the evil eyes.

"At least," he said, "be honorable enough to come one at a time. You might come first, Haki; you are said to be a brave man."

This appealed to the berserks. With one accord, all seventy raised their voices in approval. Even to their seared souls, there was something horrible in the thought of butchering an unarmored man, without giving him the chance to defend himself.

But Haki shook his head.

"I am no match for you," he replied. "Brave I may be, but I am no fool. Strike, lads! Make an end!"

Still the berserks hung back; and Sigurd backed slowly, cautiously, toward the trunk of a great pine at the forest's rim.

"Strike, cowards!" Haki roared. "Are you afraid of a single man?"

Reluctantly, the ruffians advanced, converging toward the tree, against which Sigurd had now set his back. His head was high, his eyes flashed fire; his cloak was gathered over his left arm, and the javelin poised in his right hand. As they closed, the spear flashed, and its heavy shaft flew straight at Haki's breast.

The berserk ducked nimbly, and the weapon flew over his shoulder, burying its bright head in the heart of Sveinn the Red. Instantly Sigurd followed up the shot, drawing his sword and leaping upon Haki. Borne to earth, Haki tried to raise his shield; but his adversary tore it from his arm, stabbed once with the short sword, and drew it out red. Then, before the berserks could overwhelm him, he straightened, lifted the captured shield, and flew at the nearest man.

Just as his sword sank home again, severing the outlaw's windpipe, they surged about him like wolves, hacking and tearing at him. He had good reason to rejoice in his mighty shoulders now, in the weight, the titanic strength, and the length of arm which had made him unconquerable so long. With snake-like swiftness he struck and struck again; and at every stroke a berserk fell. They drew back from him in wonder and fear. Four stalwart men lay dead on the bloody earth, and Haki himself was sorely wounded.

But now Haki rose to his feet again, his mail-shirt streaming red from the edges of the rent rings above his breast. The blow had been almost stopped by the double mail; he was wounded painfully, but not badly enough to put him out of action. With curses he drove his men to a second attack. Shields raised, they came on, circling wolf-wise about the pine, against which Sigurd once more stood at bay.

Long spear poised, a tall Orkney-man sparred for an opening. Sigurd followed his cat-like movements with cool, keen eyes. At last the man struck. With a sweep of his sword, Sigurd slashed the head off the darting spear, leaped, and buried his blade in the unguarded abdomen. Back to the tree he flashed, and stood waiting.

"Rush, dogs!" cried Haki. "Take him by storm!"

They rushed. Their weapons beat upon the lone shield, tearing and clogging it; their weight bent Sigurd to his knee. Up under the shield-rim he struck, at knee, thighs, arms, at anything exposed. The first press weakened; he was almost up before the second surged upon him. It bore him down; but wriggling like an otter, he cast aside his shield, and broke away under its shelter, bounding to his feet.

Then, with desperate fury, he himself attacked; the first sweep of his weapon smote off a berserk's head; the second cut another through the shoulder. Now the deadly sword itself was guard, flashing about his head and breast in fiery circles. The bloody horde flinched before him; some called on the gods, crying that this was no man, but Tyr, the God of Battles.

Mad with pain and rage, Haki himself rushed forward, launching himself at Sigurd's throat. Heedless of danger, he sought only to slay, bringing his blade down furiously. Not once did Haki heed the heavy edge that pierced his armor twice, drawing streams of blood; not once did he flinch, till a tearing stroke sheared through the sleeves of his mail. Then with a bitter cry, Haki fled behind his warriors, leaving his sword, still clenched in the nerveless fingers of his severed right arm, on the field.

But now the hostile weapons ringed

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Sigurd 'round on every side. Strike as he would, he could not combat them all. Knowing the end was near, he hurled himself upon the foremost foe, stretched him bleeding on the earth, turned to meet the next, and felt the point of a spear through his side. His brain whirled; a red mist closed upon his eyes. With one last access of dying strength, he drove his sword through the murderer's heart, just as an ax crashed into his skull. Sigurd Stag had fought his last fight; his brave spirit fled to its fathers.

They gathered 'round him, those cutthroats, and gazed upon the torn body.

"He died well," said one. And another—

"He was a man."

"Here, one of you!" Haki called. "Help me stanch this blood. I am bleeding to death."

A spearman tore his mantle into strips, made a tourniquet, and managed to stop most of the blood from the severed arm. He drew the mail-shirt over Haki's head, cut open the leathern jacket, and bandaged the wounds in the berserk's breast.

"No use fooling with these," he said, pointing to the dead and dying on the ground.

His enemy slain, Haki felt his spirits return. His iron constitution resisted pain and exhaustion sturdily; his fierce heart, inflamed by passion and the berserk-fury, drove his body on.

"Carry me," he said to two of his men. "We go to Ringariki."

GUNNHILD, gazing out of her bower-window, saw a long, thin line of men creeping toward the palisade in the evening dusk, their weapons glinting in the moonlight. Swiftly she sped down to the hall, roused the housecarles, sent for the maids, and ran back to her room. Quickly she drew on a coat of mail, drew a long, well-wrapped bundle from an oaken chest, and undid the wrappings. In her hand she held, scabbarded, the sword which Harald had given her. She belted it to her side, went to the hall, and called Gunnarr, her brother.

The boy had grown into a well-knit, powerful man, sturdy and long of limb. He was fully armed now, as were all the warriors: a wide shield on his left arm, a heavy ax in his hand.

"You, Yngvi and Olaf," she directed, "take the maids to the west gate. I have looked, and there is a way there; the stead is not yet surrounded. When you open the gate, run for it. Gunnarr and I will make for the lake: there is a boat by the stairs large enough to get us all away. The other twelve of you will follow, forming a shield-wall, and hold them off till we can get the boat clear. When I give the word, spring aboard and thrust out swiftly."

Swiftly they carried out her commands. Followed by the house-carles, Gunnhild and her brother ran to the south gate, threw it open, and raced for the shore. The warriors lined up behind, shields locked together, backing toward the water.

But the attack was swifter than she had foreseen. With wild yells, the berserks threw themselves upon the little band. Knowing well what failure meant to his sister, Gunnarr seized her by the shoulders and hurried on. In a moment, cries of fury from the western gate told them that Yngvi and Olaf had got the maids away, and were escaping through the forest.

Like a storm, the outlaws swooped down on the devoted house-carles. Gunnhild struggled in her brother's arms, striving to join the warriors who were fighting for her, unwilling to win safety through their death. With splendid courage the little shield-wall fought on, knowing that Gunnhild depended upon them; but they fought in vain. Haki, supported by his bearers, pointed out the girl to his ruffians; and they poured 'round the flanks of the defenders, racing to cut off their victims from the shore.

"Spare them both!" roared Haki. "Take them alive!"

His cunning brain suggested that Gunnarr would be a valuable hostage in case occasion rose to make terms with Harald.

Seeing that flight was their only chance, brother and sister ran toward the boat; but the berserks reached the water before them, and hemmed them 'round on all sides. Setting her teeth, Gunnhild stood at bay, the king's sword in her hand; and Gunnarr set his back against hers, brandishing his ax. The berserks rushed.

Gunnhild was hard-pressed. Her sword flashed down, up, and down again, drawing blood at each stroke. Her well-trained muscles served her well; berserk after berserk went down before the heavy blade. Gunnarr too fought savagely, throwing his

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full strength into every blow. The enemy struggled at a disadvantage, knowing that it would go ill with any who killed Gunnarr or injured the girl. Haki's orders were plain, and he suffered no disobedience.

They strove to beat down the defense with their heavy shields, to trip them up with the shafts of their long spears, to knock the weapons from their hands. But fighting like the Valkyr she had seemed at Hafrsfjord, Gunnhild sent them down to red death, while her brother's ax tore through shield and helmet. Within as many minutes, eight men had perished.

But it went worse with the house-carles. Surrounded, overwhelmed, their shield-wall was broken by the sheer weight of their adversaries. One by one, they were beaten down and killed, fighting to the last gasp. Darkness settled down, thick and enfolding, over the bodies of men who had served their dead lord well.

Leaving the slain, the victors joined the struggling mob about Gunnhild and Gunnarr. The two had cleared the space about them and stood waiting the renewal of the attack, dumbly wondering why these thieves did not slay them, and half expecting the return of Sigurd at any moment.

Heartened by Haki's shouts, the outlaws charged again, covering themselves with their shields, and hurtling their bodies against the knees of their opponents. Gunnarr went down under the impact, and they flung themselves on him in mass, disarming him. Staggering, Gunnhild struck at the first body she saw: the man's head rolled at her feet. Then two powerful arms went 'round her body. She struggled furiously, but in vain.

Despairing, she raised her sword for a final blow, felt more arms clinging to her shoulders, and knew that all was over. A fierce determination surged in her heart; she would not let the sword Harald had given her fall into the hands of cut-throats! With a dexterous snap of the wrist she sent the splendid weapon hurtling from her into the waters of the lake. An elbow struck heavily against her chin, and she lost consciousness.

When she awoke, Gunnhild found herself in a gorgeously-curtained bed in a strange room. The curtains were open, and seated on a massive chair by her bedside was—Thora. But she felt so heavy and ill, and her head ached so hard, that she did not perceive the significance of Thora's presence there.

Where am I?" she asked wonderingly.

"In the house of Haki the berserk," Thora answered, with a hard smile.

Gunnhild held her head in her hands and groaned. It all came back to her now, the sudden attack, the mad fight by the lake, and the smothering onset of the berserks. But her spirit reasserted itself.

"How did he dare?" she exclaimed. "Does he not fear the wrath of Sigurd?"

Thora laughed aloud.

"Sigurd is dead, little fool," she mocked.

"I do not believe it!" Gunnhild protested hotly.

Yet she knew, by the swift, sharp anguish in her heart, that it was true.

"Then this will convince you," her companion replied. And rising, she brought to the bed a wooden box, raised the lid, and showed the girl—the grim, bloody, red-gold head of Sigurd, majestic even in the horror of its severed veins and gory beard.

Shuddering, Gunnhild covered her face with her hands. For many minutes she lay quite still, the tears oozing through her fingers. At last she forced herself to be calm, and voiced that which was most imminently terrible in her thoughts—

"Since Haki has prevailed, what withholds him from the last cowardly violence to that which he has stolen?"

"Oh, you need not fear that," Thora's jeering voice replied. "Haki is badly wounded; you will not see him till he is well again, and then you are to be his wife."

Gunnhild's eyes flashed.

"So long as I live," she swore, "I will be no wife of Haki's, though he should torture me. Does Gunnarr live?"

"He lives, and is well; but he has been an unruly prisoner, and is confined in chains. No harm will come to him—unless you refuse Haki."

The girl shuddered, but composed herself at once, and answered proudly—

"I know my brother Gunnarr, and I am sure that he would rather die than see his sister shamed by marriage to one so vile as Haki."

Thora gripped the helpless girl by the shoulder, and shook her cruelly.

"What shame is there in that, you fool?" she cried. "What was too good for me is surely good enough for you. Do you think you will ever come to Harald's arms again?

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I tell you, you will never see him more! Haki has won you, and you shall be his. As for Harald, he will be lucky if Haki's wiles do not do as much for him as they did for his father.

"Haki has staked all on this throw, and he will not lose. There are many ways to kill besides the sword. Once Harald is dead, the old free days will come again; riches and honor will come to any man whose valor and cunning can win them. The slavery of law will perish from the land. And even if we should lose, if Haki dies, that will not help you, for Harald will not have you after you have been in Haki's hands."

Gunnhild covered her eyes, and was silent.

"Do you remember," Thora went on pitilessly, "the night you prevailed on Harald to thrust me from his door? You exulted then in your power and your beauty. They avail you little now; my turn has come. It was I who brought Haki upon you, who told him you were in Ringariki. I have hated you long; when I came back here, I spied upon you, and learned that you were with Sigurd, who did not dream there was any danger left in Haki.

"He knows better now, and so do you. When you taste the bitterness of despair, reflect that it was I who brought it upon you. That you may never forget it, I shall stay by you night and day till you are Haki's wife."

DAY after day, week after week, Haki lay writhing in his bed. He longed to be well and sound once more, longed for the day when the physician would allow him to rise and prepare for his wedding; moreover, he began to know fear now that he had committed himself irrevocably. What if Harald should return while he lay here tossing on his sick-bed, and slay him before he had tasted the joys for which he had risked his life and suffered maiming?

Yet as the weeks passed with no news of Harald's fleet, he came almost to think that Harald might never return, and that the gods had played into his own hands at last. But this brought him little rest, for his thoughts were ever with Gunnhild; and the restlessness of his passion kept his wounds hot and his brow fevered. His temper grew steadily worse; he would send for Thora, and abuse her for the sake of venting his spleen, blaming his wounds on her.

"You urged me to this deed," he would cry at her. "You have always advised me ill. But for you, I should be a strong man still, and have the use of my hands. When Harald finds out what I have done, he will kill me; but doubtless that was what you wanted."

Often, when Winter had frozen the lake deep and hard, and the earth was piled with snow, his mending health making his impatience fiercer, he would strike her, calling her vile names. She bore it all in silence; but her eyes grew stormy, and her jaw set whenever she came near him. Haki did not heed this; he had no fear of Thora. Yet, if he could have guessed the wild fury he had roused in her heart, and seen her bitterness against Gunnhild slowly change to something like pity, he would have watched her more closely, and would not have trusted Gunnhild in her care.

It was Thora's duty to bind Gunnhild's hands and feet the moment the captive awoke each morning, to sleep between her and the window at night. A guard stood always within call, in case Gunnhild should try to overpower the lesser strength of Thora. By day escape from the house would be instantly detected; only after dark was Thora's duty a serious one.

At length the physician gave Haki leave to quit his bed. Joyously he rose, clothed himself, and sent a servant to the bower to tell Gunnhild he was coming to speak with her. The messenger returned, saying that she refused to see him. He smiled, confident that she could not escape, and sent for the priest of Thor, without whose blessing marriages were void. Then he notified his household that the wedding would take place in three days, and bade the servants prepare a magnificent feast.

Thora gave Gunnhild his message that she must marry him on the appointed day, or her brother Gunnarr would be tortured to death before her eyes. Her heart was sick within her, but she made no reply. Gunnarr, informed of what was in store for him, bade Haki go to the snaky torment of the nether world, where the gods meted punishment to murderers.

On the second day came the priest of Thor, a kindly little old man with a weak face, oddly suited to the service of his boisterous

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deity. A stronger man would have refused to obey the berserk's summons, and denied the outlawed bully the benefit of religion.

All that day Thora was very gentle with Gunnhild. Her heart, sore and resentful at Haki's abuse, was touched by Gunnhild's noble, quiet courage. The prisoner felt her kindness, and responded. With dignified justice, she took Thora into her confidence, asked pardon for the pain she had caused her in the days that were past, and showed deep gratitude for everything Thora did to make her lot easier.

Thora, touched to the heart, felt her anger against both Gunnhild and Harald melt away, and bitterly repented the part she had played in their misfortunes. Desperate with the sense of guilt, she began to meditate schemes for aiding Gunnhild to escape, if the opportunity ever came.

It came that very day. Haki, expansive with his prospective happiness, ordered ale brought in after the evening meal, and bade his warriors drink heartily to his wedding, which should take place in the morning. Keg after keg was trundled into the hall, broached, and emptied. The berserks, heavy drinkers at best, rejoiced tumultuously in the unlimited liquor, and drank till they fell to the floor. One after another was carted off ignominiously to the outbuilding where the warriors slept.

When the night was far spent, and the sounds from the hall told her the berserks were nearly overcome with ale, Thora roused Gunnhild quietly, whispered a caution to silence, and pointed to the window.

"Be swift!" she urged. "The guard will not be changed till dawn, and they are all drunk. They will not know till you are hours gone!"

"But you?" Gunnhild asked.

"I will follow as soon as you are clear of the window. Haste!"

Gunnhild leaped toward the window, and drew the hanging aside.

ROARING drunk, Haki hiccuped over his splashing ale-horn to the last and sturdiest drinkers, boasting outrageously of the joy the morning would bring him. Fired with an idea, he cried:

"I will show you the bride! Come, lads, and you shall see the fairest woman in Norway!"

They staggered after him to the bower door. Lurching against it, Haki threw it open. Thora stood at the foot of the bed deathly pale; at the window, one foot over the ledge, stood Gunnhild, wrapped in her mantle. She flung herself forward, but Haki, quicker than she in spite of the ale he had drunk, seized her by the floating end of her mantle, and struggled to draw her back. One-armed as he was, his strength was taxed to its utmost against her struggles.

"Help me, you drunken fools!" he cried; and in the instant, Thora flung herself upon him.

Too late; the berserks dragged her off; one of them held her, fighting furiously, while the others came to their lord's rescue and dragged Gunnhild back to her prison, Panting breathlessly, horrible in his fury, Haki strode over to Thora, where she stood in the grasp of the warrior, and wrapped his huge left hand about her soft throat. The knotty fingers sank deep into the tender flesh, the evil red eyes burned into hers, as his frenzied grip choked the life from her body. Not till she was limp and dead in his grasp did he fling her to the floor. He turned to the horrified Gunnhild, leering hideously.

"Almost free, my pretty one!" he gibed. "We will give you a safer keeper. Here, Sverrir! Watch this lass until morning!"

HIS task accomplished, his voyage done, Harald beached his galleys at Oslo, and hastened overland with a hundred Westfold men. As fast as snow-shoes would carry him, he sped north to Ringariki, his heart glowing in anticipation of the welcome Gunnhild would give him, and beating high with love, he pictured to himself her joy in his deeds across the sea, remembered a hundred pretty tricks of voice and gesture she had; and the miles seemed interminable to him.

At mid-afternoon he halted his men at the further shore of the lake; and planning a surprise, he went on alone across the frozen water. In the early twilight, the hall showed dark and ghostly in the distance; no laughter rang from its walls, no merry shouts of carousing warriors reached his ears. Coming nearer, he saw a solitary figure seated on the steps, a huge figure, with its head bowed in its hands. Otherwise the hall was dark, gloomy, silent.

A sudden half-formed fear wrenched at

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Harald's heart. With a voice that trembled, he hailed the lonely figure. It raised its head, stared at him, then ran down to meet him, sobbing aloud with choking sobs that seemed to rend the mighty breast.

"Kolbeinn!" gasped Harald. He seized the burly giant by one arm. "Speak, man! What is the matter?"

With difficulty Kolbeinn choked back his sobs, raised his grief-stricken face to the king's, and answered:

"It was no fault of mine, Harald. I was away on the queen's errand in Hordaland. I got back this morning. The hall was as you see it—empty. Coming into the garth I stumbled over one of those."

He pointed to a number of long, snow-drifted heaps, turned one over with his foot, and uncovered a ghastly, frozen thing that had been a man.

"Sigurd is dead; one of the maid-servants found me here, and told me. Haki slew him."

Harald groaned.

"And Gunnhild?" he cried.

"Haki has stolen her. It is rumored that tomorrow he will force her to marry him, or slay her brother Gunnarr."

"Why did you not raise the peasants, storm the hall, and free her?" Harald exclaimed.

"I tried that. The peasants are in mortal fear of Haki; they will not stir a hand. I would have gone alone, hoping to kill Haki before I died, but it would have done no good, and might have hastened Gunnarr's death."

In spite of the anguish that tore his heart, Harald admitted the justice of this. The shock had left him almost numb with despair; but after a little his resolution asserted itself.

"Come!" he said. "There is no good done by useless grieving. I have not come alone. We shall see whether Haki will prosper in this marriage."

Kolbeinn gave a shout of joy.

"Do we go to Hadeland?" he asked.

"At once. There are enough good men across the lake yonder to crush the berserks twice over. Follow me, and make no more noise. We do not wish all the country to know that we are coming."

Hastening back to his company, Harald told them in few words what had happened, and what he intended to do. Hornklofi stepped forward, his dark face set in a mask of hate.

"If ever I have served you well, Harald," he implored, "let me strike the first blow at that fiend."

"That is as the gods may decide," the king answered. "My plan is one which does not permit the singling-out of our enemies; it is to be fire and steel."

"That is dangerous," Hornklofi protested. "Fire spares no one. We must save Gunnhild!"

"I intend to save her," Harald replied grimly. "But enough talk. Forward!"

THE hall of Haki was dark and still; not even the snores of the drunken sleepers penetrated the thick shutters. The warriors' house was also dark.

Like black wraiths, the men of Harald posted themselves about the doors of both buildings. In concession to Hornklofi's pleadings, Harald stationed him at the door of the bower, which formed an ell at the rear of the main hall. Upstairs in the hall, Harald knew Haki would be sleeping, a few of his most trusted men about him; the rest of the outlaw-band would be in the other building. Gunnhild would be in the bower.

At the last moment Harald gave way to his anxiety for Gunnhild; and leaving Kolbeinn to guard the outside stair leading down from Haki's sleeping-quarters, he ran to the bower-door, and joined Hornklofi. The poet smiled at him, a bitter, but an understanding smile.

All was in readiness. Harald gave a low, clear whistle; an answer came from the stair, from the two doors of the hall, and from the four doors of the warriors' lodgings. At each post, faint white sparks glowed against the dark; these grew into yellow flares, revealing the lintels of the doors. Then came the sound of crackling, at first soft and intermittent, then louder, and at last leaping and roaring.

Urged by the same impulse, Harald and Hornklofi drove their shoulders simultaneously against the bower-door. It held; and again they threw themselves against it. But the heavy oak held fast.

"Barred!" Hornklofi groaned. "And the flame is rising fast!"

Terror clutched Harald's heart. He had never dreamed that a mere bower, separated from the hall by a strong door, would be made so stout. Every moment the flames

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gained. They must break in before the fire made their position untenable.

The king seized his companion's arm.

"Give me your sword!" he cried. "It is heavier than mine."

Hornklofi handed him the long weapon; and seizing it in both hands, Harald drove it with all his mighty strength at the resisting door. It bit deep, and when wrenched out, left the oak cracked and splintered. Again and again he struck, the splinters flying about him, hoping to cut a hole large enough to admit his arm and allow him to reach the bar.

His blows drowned out the sound of scuffling within, the fall of a heavy body, and the groan of one in pain. But even as he raised the sword to strike again, the bar creaked, and the door swung open. He stopped in mid-stroke, dropped the sword, and reached out his arms. Gunnhild, wrapt in a heavy cloak, her glorious hair falling over her shoulders, stood in the doorway.

The rising fire shone full on her features; it illumined Harald's also; and with a glad cry, she fell forward into his embrace. On the floor behind her lay the body of the warrior Haki had set to guard her, stabbed with his own knife. Had he drunk less hard that night . . . .

But though Harald's arm longed to hold her to him, though his lips yearned for her kiss, there was work to be done. He gave her over to Hornklofi, entered the bower, which the flames were sweeping from the open doorway, made certain there was no one inside, and went out again. Hastening to the rear door of the hall, he made sure that all was well. His warriors stood watching as dogs watch a rabbit-hole, weapons ready; but no enemy had appeared. It was the same at the main door.

Passing around to the stair, Harald saw that which quickened the blood within him. Kolbeinn stood with one foot on the lowest step, wiping his ax; at his feet lay two of the berserks, with cloven skulls. The whole front of the hall was ablaze.

"No sign of Haki?" he asked.

"No sign, Harald. See how the flames lick the top of the stair and the door beyond, as if the fire itself hated him, and forbade him to pass. The roof will be down soon. I think he will die up there like an imprisoned rat. He must be very drunk."

Matters had been fiercer at the four doors of the warriors' house. The walls were wrapped in sheets of flame; already they were bending in. Great brands fell all about, dropping on the Westfold men who held the doors. Every door was wide open, and the wind sucked the flames through them with a roar. The steps and the ground about them were piled with bloody, half-scorched forms.

Inside, a handful of berserks still cowered, stupid with drink, babbling with terror of the fire and the yet more deadly steel that waited for them without. Now and again one of them would run for the door, with his hair and clothes on fire, shrieking with pain and fear; and as he reached the threshold, a bloody sword or ax would crash down upon him, sending him to a merciful death.

"Back!" Harald shouted.

The Westfold men retreated swiftly, darting back in all directions, just as the walls sagged, crumbled, and fell, the roof crashing to ruin with them. The flames shot high, the scattered bands flew like live things.

At the stair of the great hall Harald stopped again, and looked up at the raging hell of the fire above.

"Haki is roasted by this time," he observed to Kolbeinn. "There is no more need for you here. See, the very stair is half gone."

With a blast of his horn, Harald collected his men.

"It is well done," he complimented them. "Not a single man will be left alive by now."

Kolbeinn broke in upon him with a great shout.

"Lo there! A priest!" he cried, and darted into the main doorway of the hall.

Harald cried after him in vain; the giant ran into the raging furnace of the hall, heedless of the flames that reached out after him, as of the blazing, tumbling beams. A moment more, and he rushed out again, scorched and blackened, bearing in his great arms the priest of Thor. The poor priest was badly scorched, his garments blazing. Swiftly Kolbeinn rolled him in the snow till the flames were extinguished. Then he turned to Harald, still holding the suffering old man.

"He is in bad plight," said Kolbeinn, "but if I read your mind aright, Harald, a burned priest is better than no priest."

Making his way toward Hornklofi, Harald took Gunnhild in his arms once more,

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and held her close. A great wave of tenderness swept over him: pity at all she had suffered, sympathy with her grief at Sigurd's loss, mingled with joy at finding her safe again.

Suddenly a terrible thought flashed into his mind.

"Where is Gunnarr?" he cried, in a voice that vibrated with fear.

"Here, Harald!" a clear young voice answered. Gunnarr himself stepped forth from among the warriors, broken chains dangling from wrists and legs, a bloody sword in his hand. "One of your housecarles dragged me out of the hall, where I lay bound like a pig, and Kolbeinn broke my chains with his hands. I have taken rich measure of vengeance tonight."

"Good, youngling!" Harald cried from the depths of a full heart. "Kolbeinn, you dumb Bear, why did you not tell me of this?"

The giant laughed.

"Why, to tell the truth, Harald, my mind was so full of thinking what I would do to Haki when he came down that I never once thought of the lad after I had unchained him."

They retraced their way across the ice of the Rand Water, Harald and Hornklofi last, Gunnhild still in Harald's arms. A fierce joy of her possessed him; not for worlds would he have set her upon her feet. He strained her close to him; and ever and again, heedless of all about, he bent down his head and kissed her. And weary with all she had been through that night, but radiant with love, she returned his kisses, her arms clasped tight about his neck.

A YELL of fury shattered the dark. Turning swiftly, Harald saw a half-naked figure, sheeted with flame, standing on the highest fiery step of the now ruined stairs and gazing down at them in the light of the burning buildings. A naked sword gleamed in its left hand; its right was a stump. A second it stood, then it plunged down the stair, falling more than ten feet in a rain of fiery brands.

Straight for the lake it ran, undaunted by burns, by cold, or by the fear of death. It was Haki, mad with wrath and grief at his loss, in the full frenzy of the berserk rage.

The Westfold warriors, headed by Kolbeinn, turned to fall upon him; but Harald ordered them back. He set Gunnhild gently down, removed his coat of mail, shifted his own sword to his left hand, and strode forward, hate burning in his eyes, to meet his enemy on equal terms.

Haki ran rapidly over the ice, howling like a wolf in the bestial madness of the berserk. His eyes glowed like a wolf's, and he gnashed his teeth as he ran. When not ten paces separated him from Harald, he raised his sword, gazed full into Harald's eyes, and stopped short, frothing at the lips. Then, suddenly, he began to tremble; his sword sank down to his side, his eyes grew wide and horrible.

Through the frenzy that possessed him, through the mists of his drunken fury, through the very hatred and jealous passion that drove him on, fear thrust its cold hand and touched his heart. It was not caution now; he was beyond that. It was panic fear. Before him stood the threatening, terrible figure of Harald, Harald the avenger of blood, Harald the King, Harald who had hunted him surely, remorselessly.

His sword dropped from his nerveless fingers. With eyes that stared with terror, he watched it fall. With quivering hand, he picked it up by the point, set its hilt down into the snow till it rested on hard ice, and flung himself upon it. The point gleamed horribly from his back; the hilts were jammed tight against his breast.

Sheathing his sword, Harald gazed down on the dead man with grave features, from which all hate had died.

"This man had greatness in him," he said, half to himself, "but the gods cursed him with a crooked soul. It is hard that a man should die so."

A warm, smooth arm went about his neck; warm lips sought his.

"Ah, my lover, so should a king speak!" Gunnhild praised him. "He wronged us much; but even my dear foster-father whom he slew, pitied him. He is in the hands of the gods; may they not deal too hardly with him!"

Harald took her in his arms, and led her away.

"Let us think of him no more," he said. "There is a kingdom for us to think of now, and we have found each other."

THE END

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THE STOLEN CACHE

by Henry Oyen

Author of "Gaston Olaf and Big Business," "When a Man's Hungry," etc.

TOM BEVAN roused himself from his hole in the frozen snow as the first tinge of cheerless daylight disturbed the black Northern night.

"Wake up, wake up, 'Slim'!" he croaked, shaking his sleeping partner. "She's lighting up. Come on, Slim, let's get going while we're able to. We'll make the cache by noon if we can stagger that far."

He laughed, a faint ghost of a laugh coming from blue, sunken lips, as he staggered stiffly to his feet.

"By cripes! It's a pretty near thing. My legs don't want to move, and my empty belly has sucked the heart out of me. A little fine, Slim, old boy, we drew it just a little fine sticking up there so long just because the fur was coming good. That last day nearly did for us."

He looked with defiant, sunken eyes about the desolate rock-bound valley in which they had slept.

"Not a sign of meat since we started south. Nothing but wolf signs. Wish I could lay my hands on one of 'em right now. Well, it's the cache today or the long sleep for us, Slim. We won't be able to get up tomorrow morning if we don't hit the grub today. Come on; forget your —— old body. A man's body always wants to quit first in a pinch, and you've got to move it with your mind if you're going to get out of a tight hole like this. Get up, Slim; we're starting."

Slim Roberts did not move. His weak, handsome face was less pinched than his partner's, for Bevan had cheated himself in dividing the food so long as it had lasted, but his attitude as he lay crouched beneath the snow crust seemed to indicate that there remained in him none of the marvelous vitality that drove Bevan to welcome the struggle with the last stretch of the hard trail. He lifted his head slightly, tried to raise himself on his elbow and fell back helplessly.

"Go ahead, Tom," he whispered faintly. "I can't make 'er."

Tom fell swiftly upon him, shaking, beating, kicking, swearing.

"Wake up, wake up, Slim, old boy!"

His voice and body seemed to take on new strength as he sensed his partner's plight.

"There's steam in your old carcass yet. Stir yourself. Breathe hard, breathe fast; curse; start your blood a-going. We're pals, Slim Roberts, and we're going to make that cache together."

Roberts smiled weakly.

"I'll never make it, Tom; you go ahead. Good Luck!"

"Good ——!" Bevan promptly adopted a new system. "So you're a quitter, are you, Slim Roberts? You're a dirty, white-livered half-breed and not a white man, eh? You're going to lay down on me, eh, and have men say I left a pal to die on the trail. No, you don't, you cheap skunk!"

Deliberately he drew back his mittened fist and shot it cruelly into the prostrate one's face.

"Quit on me, will you!" he growled with

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assumed rage. "I'll show you. Stand up like a man and take what's coming to you."

The system did not work. Apparently Slim was too far gone to resent insults and blows. He saw through Tom's ruse and again he smiled.

"It's no use, Tom. I'd do it if I could, but I can't. You go ahead. Make the cache. Then go on to the settlement. Milly will be glad to see you. Then get dogs and come back after the furs. Don't worry about me; I'll keep here nicely."

Bevan scowled slightly at the mention of the girl. He felt there was no need of that. Roberts and he had been rivals for Milly's hand, and he had won. That there had been no hard feelings on Slim's part was indicated by his offer to join Bevan on the perilous trapping tour into the Northern barrens. There really was no need for bringing her name up at this time—still a fellow wasn't quite himself when an empty belly had got him.

Tom drew from the neck of his parka a last, hoarded piece of niggerhead tobacco. Measuring carefully with his mittened thumb he treated himself to a tiny chew.

"Here; see here, Slim Roberts," he said bending down. "Take a bite of that, not a big one, just a fair bite; there. Now here's the rest of the stick, right there inside your mitten. Keep rolling your first chew as long as there's any taste to it, then take a fresh one. Make the plug last as long as you can. It'll keep you awake and it'll kill that pain in your guts a little. I'm going to make the cache. I'm going to make it by noon.

"And I'm going to be back here with grub for you by dark, Slim Roberts, and you're going to have tea and bacon—think of it, Slim; tea and bacon—till you swell up like a poisoned pup. They can't lick us, Slim; we'll beat this game. Remember, make the plug last all day if you can and have your appetite good and sharp by dark, because I sure am going to feed you, old boy, when I get back. And keep awake, Slim, and keep your rifle handy. Wolves, you know. S'long."

The crunch of his snowshoes rang out briskly on the hard crust; he had taken on new life and strength in the crisis; he was one of those who fight hardest when they are fighting for a fallen pal.

SLIM ROBERTS lay as he was until the crunch of the snow-shoes steadily growing fainter, had died out. Then he smiled. It was not a pretty thing, that smile. It drew the hard, frozen lips back until the teeth showed like yellow fangs. It was a painful smile, a distorting smile. But worst of all, it was a smile of triumph.

Then Roberts moved. There was some stiffness in his movements, but no suggestion of exhaustion. He raised his head slowly until his eyes were above the snow crust, and peered down the valley after Tom. The valley was empty. Tom already had topped the ridge that shut out the view to the south.

Roberts deliberately stood upright and spat out his chew. To chew tobacco on a painfully empty stomach was all very well if the stomach was to remain empty for a whole day and a fellow merely wished to deaden the pain; but Slim had no need to narcotize himself thus. Slim knew that his stomach would be filled and well filled within two hours at the most.

He had known it for two months. Two months before Bevan and Slim had made the food cache on their way to the barrens. The next day Slim had remained behind alone to try for a moose whose signs he averred he had seen on a frozen creek-bed. He had not looked for any moose; he had spent that day robbing the cache and moving westward to a ravine which only he knew of.

There he had erected a clever, natural-looking cairn of rocks, and when he hurried on and caught up with Tom the partnership cache contained not a bite; the food was all hidden beneath the rocks which Slim had piled so adroitly in the hidden ravine.

He had worked it out very well, though his scheme never would have been a success had his partner been any one but the confiding Bevan. But it was because Tom was that kind of fool that Slim had gone trapping with him. The strength to do a violent deed was not in Slim. He did not even dare to shoot Tom in the back. So he had evolved this scheme; he had begun to work on it the hour when he knew that Milly Ducane desired to be Tom's.

Well, she would never be Tom's, that was all. Tom was done for. He would find the empty cache, and, knowing that there was no other food within reach of his

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strength, he would come hurrying back to where he had left Slim. Instead of Slim he would find a trail. If he had strength enough to follow that trail he would find that it led to the little ravine. But there would be no food in the ravine when he reached it. Instead there would be the signs of a fire where Slim had burned such food as he did not take away. And then there would be another trail, a broad, swift trail where Slim, strengthened by much good food, would be traveling southward, drawing a light sledge bearing sufficient food to see him through the week necessary to reach the settlement.

Perhaps Tom would start out on that trail, too, for he was a marvel of strength and stubborn enough to crawl on until he died. Slim gave him until daylight next day. No more. Tom had cheated himself on the division of food, and he was traveling now only on his nerve.

Yes, it had been a good scheme and it had worked out to the letter. Slim admitted to himself that he had worked it cleverly. Driving the dogs into the spring hole on the trapping grounds had been something of a masterpiece in itself. But the slick fashion in which he had managed to induce Tom to stay North until his strength would be spent by the time the old cache was reached; that was the capstone of Slim's carefully builded scheme. And now—the finish.

Slim did not gloat as he belted in his parka, nor did he shake his fist in the direction of the rival he had doomed. He merely spat a second time on the snow and, tucking his rifle beneath his arm, swung westward, over the hills toward his cache.

He went swiftly, picking his landmarks unerringly in the dim light, and it was not until he was on the moraine which ended in the ravine that he paid the slightest attention to anything but the way of his going. It was broad daylight now, and as he crunched over the snow-covered rocks he noticed that the wolf signs were growing more frequent. The discovery made little impression upon him; he was too occupied with the idea of reaching the cache as soon as possible, and wolf signs had been common along the trail for the last two days. Within a half mile of his cache he noticed that the signs all seemed to lead to the west. This was strange, and he puzzled over it idly as he went along. There must be a herd of caribou somewhere to the west, and the wolves, of which there seemed to have been a dozen, were on its trail.

He thought no more of wolves until he was almost in sight of his cache. Then the unmistakable wail of a dog-wolf in its death throes came to his ears. Slim stopped. The weird sound, breaking forth in the gloomy waste, chilled his spine. A hundred yards away he saw a long, gray shape dragging across the snow. Slim threw his rifle forward, but the wolf was trying to flee and he saw that its back was broken.

"Been fighting," thought Slim, and moved on.

A snarl from behind a rock stopped him again. A huge starved beast, still licking its chops to taste the death-blow it had just dealt the crawling animal, fled like a gray shadow into hiding. Slim tried to swallow the lump of fear which rose suddenly in his throat and ran forward, panting and pop-eyed, until he saw his cache.

The wolves had found it. He had builded cunningly his cairn of rocks, but he had not been able to build well enough to shut out the odor of bacon from the super-sensitive nostrils of these famished beasts from the barrens. They had found it. Now they were at it, a dozen of them, snarling and whining, as they pawed in vain at the heavy rocks or dug and bit at the frozen snow and earth in an effort to burrow in beneath the pile of food.

Roberts tried to shout, but his throat was paralyzed. Panic seized him, body and mind, blotting out in a flash all his trapper's craft, all the dearly bought knowledge of the experienced snow-country man, and leaving him a trembling wreck, crazed by fear.

He threw his rifle up and began to fire without waiting for the sights to come on. Six times he shot madly, his bullets whipping the snow harmlessly. The seventh time the hammer fell with a futile click and Slim cried out in a tone that was close kin to the wail of the stricken wolf—

"Tom! Gimme some shells!"

The sound of his mad shriek frightened him. He looked wildly around, fearful that Tom might have heard. His rifle was empty. He had kept six cartridges only because of the weight. Tom had carried the rest. Tom—Tom was gone.

Slim rubbed his eyes. The wolves had retreated a couple hundred yards and were

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beginning to spread out in a circle. Slim had never seen such wolves before. Why didn't they flee as wolves should at the sight and scent of a man in daylight? Even as he stood there, with the roar of his shots scarcely gone, two long, gray shapes, more desperate than their brothers, ceased circling and began to move toward the cache.

The sight spurred Slim from his despair and he raced to the cache. A dozen yards away the two bold wolves crouched, belly down on the snow, waiting. Their plight was much more desperate than Slim's; the pangs of hunger, stirred by the odor from the cache, had maddened them, numbing in them the instinct which taught them to flee when the scent of man and iron touched their nostrils.

Slim clubbed his rifle and walked toward them. The pair retreated slowly out of reach. Slim stopped. So did the wolves. For the space of several seconds man and animals faced each other silently.

"Hoos!" shouted Slim, waving his arms.

The wolves gave back a step or two. Slim retreated backward to his cache, and the beasts followed him step for step. When he backed against his cairn of rocks the wolves were a dozen yards away, lying down, waiting.

Slim had forgotten all about Tom, he had forgotten about his scheme and plans, he thought only of the long-jawed animals which circled him about. He put his back squarely against the cairn and faced them. The hunger in their eyes frightened him more, and he climbed up and stood on the cairn.

He would not leave that rock-pile. No, he would never leave it, never let those gray devils get a chance at his back. He was going stark mad from fear. No, they would never get him out in the open again. He stood with his rifle clubbed ready to strike, and the wolves waited.

II

TOM BEVAN had worried a little about the wolves when he left Slim that morning. He had seen by the signs that there were many of them, and in that country at that time of the year he knew they would be crazed from starvation. If there had been any other way out of it he wouldn't have left Slim.

Suppose the old boy would go off into a doze from hunger and cold? Wolves were darn bold when they were starving. They probably wouldn't dare try anything until nightfall, still. . . .

Tom reached the rifled cache by eleven o'clock.

It took him a few minutes to comprehend that the food was gone. He did not rave. The cache was cleaned, that was the fact to face. It didn't matter how it had happened. If they were going to get out alive they must find food elsewhere. Rather, he must find it, because poor old Slim was all in. Where and how was food to be got? There was nothing, except the wolves. Tom shouldered his rifle and went back for Slim at even a swifter pace than he had traveled for the cache.

In the middle of the afternoon he was back at the spot where Slim had lain, and his conscience smote him grievously.

"I shouldn't have left him," he reproached himself. "Poor old pal! The hunger's made his head light, and he started out to follow me and got lost."

He started out on Slim's trail without a minute's rest. He had already reached the stage where only the ceaseless prodding of his mind forced the heavy feet to move the snow-shoes forward, but Slim was out there some place, out of his head, alone in a wolf country, and he must be found.

So Tom drove on, staggering and stumbling, and just before dark he looked down in a ravine and saw his pal.

Roberts was still on top of the cache; the wolves were still waiting.

A great cry of relief and gratitude that he had not come too late welled up from Tom Bevan's heart.

"Hang tough, Slim; I'm coming!"

Slim Roberts leaped at the sound and looked up.

Tom was cocking his rifle. With the cry of a maniac Slim sprang down into the wolf pack and ran blindly, madly, anywhere to get away from the vengeance of the partner he had betrayed.

"This way, Slim, this way!" cried Tom as he began to decimate the pack; but Slim ran in the opposite direction.

He went out of sight around a bend in the ravine with half of the pack at his heels. He was a good runner, and had he come toward Tom the wolves would not have been repaid for their long wait.

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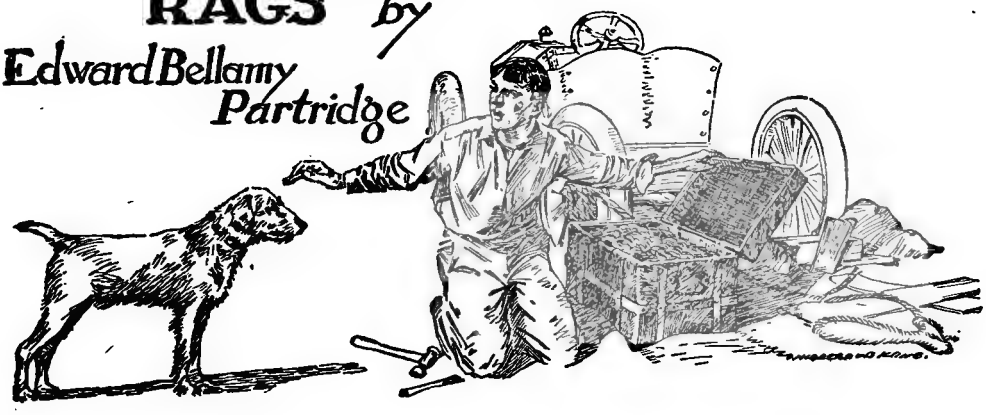
RAGS

by Edward Bellamy Partridge



FOR the fourth time in less than an hour Dave Colton drew from his pocket and read an advertisement clipped from the *Morning Union:*

WANTED—Strong, young Americans, not afraid of hardships or dangers, to go to foreign country on expedition requiring no money or experience. Big returns if successful. Address M 98 this paper.

As he folded the clipping and put it back in his pocket he glanced expectantly at the telephone, then stole an anxious look at the clock on the mantel. "Five minutes more," he muttered to himself. "I wrote them to call me between two and three o'clock; and if I don't hear anything—I suppose it'll mean that somebody got in ahead of me——"

A ring came from the telephone. Dave jumped to answer it. With a trembling hand he took off the receiver.

"This is David Colton," he said in a low voice. "Yes, sir—yes, sir—it'll take me almost an hour to get there—yes, sir, I understand. I'll meet you there just as soon as I can get there—good-by."

He had just hung up the receiver and was reaching for his cap when his mother came into the room.

"What was it, David?" she asked.

Covered with confusion, the boy managed to stammer out that he was "just telephoning about a job."

His mother's interest was aroused at once.

"What kind of a job is it?" she inquired.

"Why—why, he didn't say, mother," Dave answered, guiltily, as he opened the door. "Perhaps I'll be able to tell you more about it when I get back."

He stepped outside, closed the door softly after him, and hurried to the packing-shed to get his motor-cycle. As he raised the standard with his toe, he glanced 'round at the stack of orange boxes that he and his father had built during the previous weeks in anticipation of a record crop; and as he wheeled the machine out of the doorway his eyes rested for a moment on the withered branches of the trees and the orange-strewn ground beneath. Then he quickly looked down at the pedal of the machine, and without again raising his eyes, gave the pedal a quick spin with his foot, leaped into the saddle and went popping out of the driveway.

Four o'clock had not yet struck when he entered the east door of the post-office in San Diego, and walked slowly along the exchange as he looked with care at each person he met. Opposite the "general delivery" window he paused. He had found what he was looking for: a plain green button in the lapel of a man's coat.

Dave quickly raised his eyes to the face above the button and was not favorably impressed; he had expected to find more of a gentleman. For a moment he was tempted to walk away without making his identity known, but on second thought it came to him that gentlemen and "big returns" did not always go together, and he went up and spoke to the man.

"I am looking for Mr. Ross," he said quietly.

The man did not reply, nor did he raise his eyes, but he moved toward the speaker the card on which he had been writing. Dave glanced at it and read:

Step outside. I will follow.

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He went out and stood beside his motorcycle, where, a moment later, he was joined by the stranger.

"You are Mr. Colton, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I am the party who talked with you over the phone. I am Mr. Ross."

Dave nodded.

"Glad to meet you," he mumbled.

"How old are you, Mr. Colton?"

"Twenty-one."

"What's your business?"

"Why, I've been working with my father on his orange ranch, that is, until the frost came along and put us out of business."

"Put you out of business?"

"Why, yes, sir. We had a big payment to make on the mortgage, and there was enough fruit in sight to put us on 'easy street'—and then the frost came. It wiped us out. We couldn't even pay the interest——"

"So you're out of a job?" said Mr. Ross as Dave came to a halting conclusion.

"Out of a job! Why, we're all flat busted! Every dollar we had in the world was in that ranch," he added more slowly. "And it's going to be sold on the court-house steps next week. It wouldn't be so bad if father was in good health, but he came out here on account of his lungs, and he was just beginning to get a little better when this thing happened——"

"Have you got any nerve, young man?" demanded Mr. Ross abruptly.

"I guess so—enough."

"Can you shoot?"

Dave smiled.

"Some," he replied.

"Speak any language besides United States?"

"No, sir"

"Know anything about navigation?"

"No, sir; but I understand about gas motors pretty well."

Mr Ross set his jaw reflectively.

"Well," he said at length, "I was on my way to the dock. Supposing you walk along with me; we'll talk as we go."

As Dave fell in beside him he went on:

"I had hopes that you'd know a little Spanish or 'Geezer, or something about seamanship, but perhaps you'll do."

"B-b-but you h-haven't told me anything about what this expedition is for!" stammered the boy. "I don't know where you're going, or what you're going to do!"

Mr. Ross smiled grimly under his brows.

"This is a secret expedition, young man," he said. "Nobody knows where we're going or why, and nobody will know until we're out of port. Of course, you're all entitled to guess as much as you want to."

"Well," replied Dave in a dubious tone. "I'm afraid I'll have to think it over."

"You can't think long; there's only one vacant berth left, and I've got several applicants for the place. They're all anxious to get a whack at those 'big returns' and they're not afraid to take a chance or two to get in on them. The possibility of a little hardship, and maybe a little danger don't scare *them* to death."

Dave flushed.

"It isn't that I'm *afraid*," he returned quickly. "But I wouldn't like to get mixed up in a thing, and then find out—well—find out that it's—that it's——"

"Against the law?"

Dave nodded his head.

"*You* should worry about that," scoffed Mr. Ross. "*I'll* do all the worryin' on that score. You won't be asked to do anything criminal."

They walked on in silence for some little distance before Dave asked——

"When do you intend to start?"

Again Mr. Ross smiled grimly as he shook his head and replied——

"That's a little uncertain—it all depends."

After another silence Dave asked apologetically——

"Would it be all right for me to inquire how long you expect to be gone?"

"Not long," was the ready answer, "might be a matter of ten days, might be four weeks. That depends, too."

"Going by water, I suppose," Dave ventured nervously.

"That's the idea," nodded Mr. Ross.

A MOMENT later as they started to go out on the wharf, a burly Mexican with a drooping mustache called Mr. Ross aside and engaged him in an animated conversation. While this was taking place Dave was making the acquaintance of a dog that had come bounding to welcome Mr. Ross. He was a big rangy fellow, undoubtedly of Airedale origin, but without enough sharp corners about him to be valuable. On his cheap collar was the name "Rags."

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Dave scratched the dog's neck, let his collar out a hole, shook hands with him ten or twelve times, and made the beginnings of a friendship that was to mean a great deal both to himself and to Rags in the days to come. The Mexican hurried away and Mr. Ross came back to Dave and said:

"My skipper tells me that everything's gone through all right, so we're going to clear immediately. I hope you have taken advantage of this little time to make up your mind to go along with us."

"But I haven't any of my things with me!" the boy remonstrated.

"You won't need much more than you've got on. I'll let you have whatever you do."

"But there's my motor-cycle! It's standing out in front of the post-office——"

"But what does a motor-cycle amount to!" sneered the adventurer. "If this expedition goes through you'll be able to afford to leave *automobiles* standing around!"

Dave swallowed once or twice convulsively and then said——

"But I haven't told my folks a thing!"

"All the better; they won't be worrying about you. Well, what's the answer? Are you going to get in on this chance of a lifetime? Or are you going to let it slip?"

Dave hesitated. He felt that he really didn't know enough about the project to tell whether he wanted to join it or not. He didn't like the looks of the leader, and the looks of the skipper he liked even less; and if the men who had lounged past while he was getting acquainted with the dog, were to be his companions, he liked their looks even less than those of the skipper. But, on the other hand, there were the court-house steps; and if there was even a slender chance of making a large sum of money . . . .

A cold nose nuzzled into his hand. Here was one member of the party he liked the looks of, and one who could be trusted.

"This your dog?" asked Dave.

"Yes," grunted Mr. Ross; "but never mind the dog. Are you with us or not?"

"Why—why, I'll—I'll go."

"Good boy! You'll never be sorry. And if we put this thing over—well, you'll have more money than you ever saw in your life. We'll go on board now."

"B-b-but," stammered Dave, "don't you think we ought to have a little better understanding about—about terms?"

"You'll get in just the same as the others. There'll be plenty of time to talk that over after we get started."

Mr. Ross dismissed the subject with a gesture, and led the way along the dock. Dave followed.

A quarter of an hour later he stood on the deck of the *Vittoria* as the little steamer drew quietly into the stream and headed for the open sea. According to her papers the *Vittoria* had cleared for Cerros Island with a cargo of hardware and canned goods —but the papers are not always to be trusted. However, her real destination is a matter of little importance, as she never succeeded in reaching it. But here she was loaded to the Plimsoll's mark, and putting out to sea in plain sight of the storm signals fluttering from the flagpole of the Government weather bureau.

Of course the captain and the skipper knew that a blow was predicted, but the crew of landlubbers knew nothing about it until the boat had run out from behind the protection of Point Loma and plunged into the nasty sea beyond. And then it was too late for the knowledge to be of any use to them.

When they saw what was before them they ought to have turned back, but neither the captain nor the skipper dreamed of doing any such thing; there were certain reasons why they did not care to take any chances on returning to San Diego. And besides, the *Vittoria* was a stanch little craft that would give a good account of herself in any sort of weather, and with her course southeast and the storm from the northwest, she would ride out almost anything that came along.

But the blow soon became a gale, and the gale turned into a hurricane, and with her heavy load the *Vittoria* did not ride as well as had been expected; in fact, she plowed along like a partially submerged submarine. For a time the seas that washed her deck were merely wet. Then they became boisterous; and not until they had washed away the starboard rail and two members of the crew would the captain admit that they were rough. And while he still professed to have no doubt that the *Vittoria* could make it, he thought it might be prudent to run into the lee of one of the Coronado Islands, which lie some twenty-five miles offshore, and anchor there until the weather had moderated.

But his decision had come too late; the

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Vittoria could not stand the strain. For, as she came about, a giant sea crumpled up her rudder as if it had been made of pasteboard, and she rolled down into the trough doomed and helpless.

One by one the life-boats were torn from the davits and swept away until only a single boat remained. This the captain ordered to be hauled to the after deck and lashed to the stern bitts, while the entire ship's company gathered 'round and watched for a favorable chance to launch it.

Dave was standing near the boat ready to give a hand at the captain's word, and clinging to the gunwale for support as the waves swept the deck, when he happened to think of Rags. And without a moment's hesitation he rushed below to get his friend. He had just caught the dog in his arms when he felt the thunderous crash of a giant sea. The boat quivered and careened, and the inrush of water through the open hatchway knocked the boy off his feet and washed him the length of the cabin.

But he struggled to his feet and made his way to the deck, and there he paused aghast; the lifeboat and all the men were gone. He was alone on a sinking ship!

Together the boy and the dog tumbled down the companionway and took refuge in one of the upper bunks as the floor of the cabin was now badly awash, and was becoming more so with every sea that swept over the boat. After a little Dave thought it might be best for him to close the hatch, but he found that it had been washed away. Instead of looking for an emergency cover, of which there were several, he crept back into the bunk and snuggled up to Rags, and waited for the morning that he thought he never would see.

WITH the first faint gleam of the dawn the boy made his way up the stairs and looked out. He saw land! And he saw that the *Vittoria* was being driven rapidly toward it!

He knew at a glance that it was one of the Coronado Islands. And as he hurried below to get the dog it occurred to him that these islands were uninhabited and that he ought to take something with him to keep him alive in case he should reach the shore. So he felt his way to the galley and hunted for the cook's stores.

But he found that the water had been there ahead of him and had ruined nearly everything. Then he happened to remember all the canned goods in the cargo, and seizing an ax, he broke open a case marked "Canned Peas." He found the cans unexpectedly heavy, and on hacking one of them open with the ax, found it full of cartridges. Then he opened a larger case and found it full of rifles. He uttered a low whistle.

"And here I was trying to smuggle ammunition into Mexico to shoot my own countrymen!" he muttered. "I deserve to be shipwrecked!"

However, regardless of what he deserved, he hurriedly resumed his search for food. But just as he had again reached the galley the boat grounded with a deafening crash, and rolled over on her side. The floor and the side wall changed places and Dave was sent sprawling into a cupboard of tinware.

As he fell his hand struck a small object that he instantly recognized as a box of matches. He thrust it gratefully into his pocket and fought his way into the cabin through the surging water which was now filled with all sorts of floating wreckage. Here he found that Rags had been spilled out of the bunk and was swimming 'round among the flotsam.

He picked up the dog, and although greatly hampered by the life-preserver he had been wearing since the night before, he managed to wriggle through the companionway and leap into the sea.

Half an hour later the boy and the dog dragged themselves out on the sand more dead than alive and lay down to rest. When Dave was sufficiently revived to be able to speak he addressed Rags very solemnly.

"Rags," he said, "you've saved my life. I'd never have been able to get to shore without your help. And if I ever get a chance to show my gratitude you just watch me do it!" After a moment he added—"But now let's dry out our matches so we can build a little fire and get warm."

He drew the tin box from his pocket and opened it. It contained a safety razor and a dozen blades. So instead of building a fire Dave took off his clothes and wrung them out; and after he had put them on again he and Rags ran up and down the beach to dry themselves.

Then the question of water began to make itself felt. How were they going to satisfy their thirst? And how was Dave, barefooted as he was, to make his way about over the stony ground and through

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the cactus in search of a spring or a water-hole. He put the matter off as long as he could, hoping that some sort of foot-covering would float in from the wreck; but at last it would wait no longer. Something had to be done. So he slowly picked his painful way up the rough hillside.

From the top of a rocky knoll he saw a cañon a short distance away, and toward this he crept. At the bottom of the cañon was a slender thread of green through which a tiny stream trickled, and from which the boy and the dog drank gratefully. Then they returned to the beach to watch the wreck. And when once more they were seated on the sand Dave explained the situation to the dog.

"We haven't got a thing to eat, Rags," he said sadly, "and we haven't a match."

Rags wagged his stump of a tail in wordless sympathy.

"You see, if we had matches we could build a smoke, and the people over on the mainland might see it and send help. And at night we could build a big fire up there on the peak—but I don't know as I could ever climb up there in my bare feet."

The movement of Rags' tail denoted doubt.

"But one thing is sure, Rags," Dave went on; "the only place where we're going to get anything to eat 'round here is from the *Vittoria*, and eats are what we need most of all. But look at the old girl! She's just as sound as when we left her! If we'd only known how she was going to behave we might have thrown some stuff overboard. But I thought from the sound that she was going to pieces before we could get off from her.

Rags looked as if he did, too.

"And look at what I've got on!" Dave continued more to himself than to the dog. "A light flannel shirt and a pair of khakis, and nothing but Summer underwear; and you can bet it's going to be cold tonight."

It was cold, bitter cold. And, unable because of his bare feet to look up a cave or cairn where they would have been out of the wind, the boy and the dog burrowed down into the sand where, half-frozen, they lay huddled together until morning, while the wind howled and whined, and the storm raged, and the surf thundered and crashed and threatened to demolish the island.

WHEN daylight came the *Vittoria* was gone, and the boy and dog hurried down to the beach to see what they could salvage. The shore was littered with wreckage of all sorts except the edible varieties, but by far the greater part of it consisted of munitions of war. Finally, however, Rags discovered a side of bacon, and a little later Dave found a box of sea-biscuit. The sea-biscuit had been melted by the salt water into a pulpy mass, but Dave carefully preserved it.

And not long afterward Dave ran across a case of canned beans without a single cartridge in it, although to all outward appearances it resembled a dozen other cases similarly marked, but filled with canned cartridges—and thereupon he and Rags had something to eat. Then Dave put on two of the left shoes out of the three that he had found, and walked over to the cañon for a drink. When he came back, out of idle curiosity, he pried open a large case which he had supposed would contain some piece of war material, and to his utter disgust found inside the stripped chassis of a small automobile with a gun platform mounted behind.

"Why couldn't it have been a motor-boat?" he groaned. "Or an aeroplane? Or even a box of grub? But an automobile on this deserted island!"

It was really beyond words.

But with a boy's love of mechanical things, he was soon examining the car and looking over the extra equipment, of which there appeared to be no end. He was particularly interested in the engine-pump for inflating tires and the extra magneto that could be brought into operation by the movement of a little lever. Suddenly he straightened up with a jump.

"Rags!" he cried. "That mag has dried out! I just got a shock from it!"

Rags heard but was not interested. One shock more or less was nothing to him. But when Dave took a wrench and removed the plug from a barrel of gasoline that had drifted ashore, the dog began to show more interest. Dave dipped the raveled end of a rope into the gasoline and then hurried back to the automobile, where he removed a sparkplug and laid it on top of the cylinders. After this he engaged the magneto and gave the engine a turn. When the current passed through the plug, making a long blue spark Dave applied the gasoline-soaked

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rope, which instantly burst into flame. In another minute he had started a bonfire.

He was soon frying some bacon in a tin can, and heating up a can of the beans. Dave no longer felt any resentment toward the automobile for being cast up by the sea. Quite to the contrary, he was afraid lest something should happen to it. So he tore away the crating, and after filling the tank with gasoline, ran it up on the sand some distance beyond the high-water mark.

And as he sat on the seat of the car he put his arm around Rags who was sitting beside him, and said:

"Rags, old boy, if it's clear tonight we'll build three roaring fires right up on that peak and see if we can't stir up a little interest on the mainland. What do you say?"

Rags was willing. And even with two left shoes on, the peak was an easy climb. Nor was the material lacking to build any number of fires. But when night came, Dave had changed his mind. He wished to attract as little attention as possible. So he and Rags snuggled up together behind a little shelter they had thrown up beside the automobile, and with the assistance of a small fire, spent a comparatively comfortable night.

Early the next morning Dave jumped up and raced with Rags 'round a rocky point a few hundred yards to the east to see whether he had been dreaming or not. He had not. For there, just as he had seen it the night before, was the rotting hulk of an ancient craft that had undoubtedly been washed out of its burial-place when the ocean had been driven by the unprecedented storm over the sand-bar and into the lagoon the night the *Vittoria* was wrecked; and there between the ribs of the hulk just as he had seen it all night in his dreams, lay the little metal-bound chest to which he had pinned his fondest hopes.

He measured the depth of the lagoon with a cord to which he had tied a stone, and found it to be nearly thirty feet. Then he went back and cooked some breakfast for himself and the dog.

Dave had read of divers who could work thirty feet below the surface without apparatus, but he knew that he was not one of them. He was distressed by six feet of water; he must think up some other way.

When he had finished his breakfast, Dave began to do things that were utterly incomprehensible to the dog. In the first place he took a hammer and cold-chisel from the tool-kit of the car and cut out the top of a perfectly sound sixty-gallon, galvanized iron tank that he had carefully salvaged the day before. Then with the use of some planks he backed the car down on to the moist, hard sand packed by the outgoing tide, loaded the planks on the back, put the mutilated tank on top of the planks, and started off down the beach.

By using the planks again he succeeded in getting the car on the rocks beside the deepest part of the lagoon, and there he blocked it firmly with the planks and some stones. Then he spent a great deal of time measuring the distance from the engine air-pump to the little metal-bound chest on the bottom of the lagoon, after which he sat down on the sand with such a gloomy expression on his face that Rags went over to see what he could do to help matters.

"Well, Rags," said Dave mournfully, "I guess we're up against it. We're shy about three feet of pump-hose, and there isn't another inch to be found anywhere. You see, Rags, there's a little chest down there on the bottom of that pool, and I think it's got something in it that we need awful bad; not here on the island, you know. We couldn't use money here, but we aren't going to be here so very long after we get it—if we ever do. You see, Rags, that water's too deep for me to dive down and put a rope around that little chest, so I had to think up another way.

"That's why I cut the head out of that tank; I was going to make a diving-bell out of it. You see, Rags, if I could fasten the hose of the air-pump to the spigot on the tank, and then start the engine, I'd have fresh air coming in there so that I could stay under the water for an hour if I had to; but the confounded hose is too short to reach to the bottom, and it's about twice as long as the average pump-hose at that. I need at least three feet more—and there isn't another inch to be found anywhere."

Rags wagged his stump of a tail understandingly, but offered no suggestions.

Suddenly Dave jumped to his feet.

"Bonehead!" he exclaimed. "Why didn't I think of that before! What's the reason I can't use the gas tubing that runs from the acetylene tank to the headlights? It's copper, but I can tape it to the pump-hose; there's a whole roll of tape in the kit." He measured it with his eye. "Ha! There's

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one piece that's at least four feet long. Now there'll be something doing!"

Dave was not long in removing the gas tubing from the car and inserting it into the pump-hose, which he had cut in two at a point about one foot from the air-pump; but before taping it in place he bent a circular eye in each end of the copper tubing through which to pass the tape, so that the tubing could not pull out of the rubber hose without a very severe tug.

To attach the pump-hose to the spigot was not so simple a matter. Dave puzzled over it for a long time before he thought of a way to do it. The finding of a little tool used for recutting the threads of bruised valve-stems finally suggested a solution. He removed the spigot and after heating it in a bonfire to soften the metal, slowly and carefully hammered it down until the little die would go over the end of it. Then he cut a thread on which he was able to screw the hose connection—and make an air-tight coupling.

He was now ready to try out the air-line for leaks. So he braced one of the planks under the automobile with an end projecting out over the pool like a springboard, and by means of a rope lowered the tank to the surface of the water, open end downward. He tied it in this position, and after engaging the air-pump gears, started the engine.

When he had tested all the connections with moisture and found them tight, he took off his clothes, dived into the pool and came up with his head under the diving-bell, where he remained for fully five minutes. He would doubtless have remained longer if Rags had not become so concerned over his master's welfare that he leaped into the water and tried to drag the amateur diver from under his diving-bell.

DAVE'S next consideration was the weighting of the diving-bell so that it would go to the bottom and remain there long enough for him to get a rope around the treasure-chest—if such it should prove to be. He knew that quite a heavy weight would be required to drag down so large a body of air, but understanding little of physics he was unable to figure it out even approximately. The only thing left for him to do was to experiment. So he loosened the elevator rope and began to tie rocks to the tank. These were all so attached that they hung about two feet below the bottom rim of the tank, and were evenly distributed 'round the circle.

With each rock he added, he let out a little more rope until the tank was entirely submerged and its displacement complete. Then he tied a large stone to the other end of the rope for a balance-weight; and the diving-bell hung suspended.

Dave now tied a stone to the end of a long piece of one-inch rope and without much difficulty succeeded in laying it directly across the little chest. The shore end of this rope was tied to another stone so that it would not be drawn into the water. When this had been done to his complete satisfaction, Dave again started the engine, and after seeing that the air-pump was working properly, armed himself with his open pocket-knife and a large screw-driver, and let himself down into the water.

He came up under the diving-bell, and tried to make it go down by putting his weight on it; but the counterweight and the friction of the rope over the plank were too much for him. So he reached out from beneath the tank and cut the rope to which the counterweight was attached. And the tank went to the bottom like a plummet.

David tried hard to get out from under, but fortunately for him, did not succeed; for he reached the bottom alive and in good order with the exception of a large bump on the top of his head, and when he had recovered from the shock of the sudden descent he found that the diving-bell was undamaged and that fresh air was coming into it according to schedule from the faithful little pump above.

But he had stirred up a terrible roil, and some minutes elapsed before he was able to see the guide-stones that he had dropped into the pool to show the way to the little chest. However, when once it had cleared up enough for him to see the stones, he had little difficulty in dragging the diving-bell over to the wreck.

He bent down and passed his hands over the little chest, and no longer doubted that it was what he had thought it was. He tried to lift it, but was unable even to move it. Then with feverish haste he began to dig a passage under it for the rope, and soon he had a double turn securely tied 'round it. After he had drawn down the knots with all his strength he was ready to go to the surface.

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This he had supposed would be simply a matter of slipping out from under the diving-bell and swimming to the surface aided by a strong shove against the bottom with his feet. But the moment he drew his head under the water, he quickly thrust it up into the air-space of the diving-bell again, for the pressure nearly split his ear-drums.

It was an awkward situation, but not nearly so awkward as it became a moment later, when the engine stopped. For an instant the boy was panic-stricken. Then he began to do some thinking.

"If worse comes to worst I can put my fingers in my ears and try the water again, only of course I can't swim so very well without using my arms. But I won't try that water till I have to; that's the last resort, but it's a sure one."

The idea comforted him, and he thought further. Suddenly he gave a gasp.

"Bonehead!" he exclaimed. "Why didn't I think of that before! I deserve to suffocate if I don't know any more than that."

He reached out with the knife which he still had in his hand and cut loose one of the ballast rocks. Then he cut another, and another, and as the tank began to ascend he cut still another. The tank rose rapidly to the surface, and Dave was soon drawing himself out on the rocks before Rags, who was nearly frantic with joy at seeing his master again.

With scarcely a glance at the dog Dave scrambled to his feet and hurried over to see whether the engine had stopped of its own accord, or had been stopped by some human agency. He found the ignition switch still on, but nevertheless he looked carefully about for tracks. He found none except his own, exclusively left-footed ones, and those of the dog. Then he examined the engine and found it hot, very hot. He tried the crank and was unable to turn it over. After that he felt better.

"It's all right, Rags," he said. "The little engine came across when we needed her the most, and we don't care if she is stuck now. I never thought to look at the oil, and she's as dry as a bone. But we should worry. "'Her day's work is done,'" he sang gaily.

However, it wasn't; he was mistaken. For when he tried to pull the chest out of the water he found that he was unable to move it. And he and Rags went back to camp that night hopeful, and still, very uneasy. They were back on the job shortly after daybreak the next morning and Dave set about rigging a windlass on one of the rear wheels of the automobile. It was a crude affair, bolted to the wheel with bolts taken from the spring shackles and the steering-gear, but it was strong and substantial.

He had finished blocking the car even more securely than before and was all ready to start the engine when he happened to remember that it needed oil. But this did not cause any very great delay, for he drew off the thick "600-W" from the rear axle housing in a tin can and poured it directly into the cylinders through the spark-plug openings, and after working it down around the pistons by turning the engine over with the crank, switched on the ignition. The engine started off with a rush that made it jingle, and Dave climbed into the seat.

He had already made fast to the drum of the windlass the rope which was tied around the little chest, and as he pressed his foot on the low-gear pedal the rear wheel which he had jacked up, began to turn slowly—the drum had soon taken the slack out of the rope, and then something had to give. The little car tugged at its blocking, rocked slightly once or twice, and then something gave. It was the little chest coming out of its resting-place.

It flopped over, slid along the sandy bottom, and then began to rise slowly through the water, swaying back and forth as it rose. When Dave jammed on the brakes and shut off the engine the chest was lying on the rocks close to the car.

Trembling with excitement, the boy caught up a hammer and cold-chisel and began to work on the lid. It took him some little time to get it open, as it had been thoroughly sealed by the corrosive action of the salt water. At last, however, it yielded, and he raised the lid.

He gasped, and drew back in astonishment; then he passed his hand over his forehead to clear away any insane delusions that might be clouding his brain, so utterly unbelievable was the sight he beheld.

After a moment he cautiously reached out—afraid lest he should dispel a beautiful dream—and picked up one of the dull coins with which the chest was filled. It was an American twenty-dollar gold-piece half a century old!

As he laid the coin carefully back in the chest a change came over him. At a slight

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sound from Rags he slammed down the lid and glanced fearfully back over his shoulder. When he saw that it was nothing but the dog, he heaved a sigh of relief.

"Gee, Rags!" he breathed. "You nearly scared me out of a year's growth! I thought somebody was coming."

Without delaying another moment Dave dug a hole in the sand and temporarily buried the chest while he went in search of a suitable place to hide it. He found a number of cairns and crannies, but none that suited him. Finally, Rags, while in pursuit of a ground squirrel, ran across a cave, the entrance to which was obscured by a wall of rock. When Dave saw the dog disappear into what looked like a solid wall of stone he investigated and found just what he was looking for.

It was a small cave, but easy of access when once a person had found it, and it had a dirt floor in which he could easily bury his treasure. Without a moment's hesitation Dave began to move into it, although it was some little distance from the place where he had found the chest.

HE MADE a number of trips back and forth, carrying the gold-pieces in tin cans, and after the money had all been moved to the cave he got the chest, which was made of copper, instead of iron, as he had supposed. He was on his knees in the cave digging with his hands and a screw-driver when he heard voices outside, followed by an angry growl from Rags.

He jumped to the entrance and peered cautiously 'round the wall of rock, chills frisking up and down his spine, his heart thumping wildly.

Rags was holding at bay a party of Chinamen, who were huddled together jabbering excitedly. Dave knew that they had not seen him, and that in all probability they would not see him if he remained where he was. He felt sure that if they did not see him his treasure would be safe. But when one of the Chinamen drew a revolver and aimed at the dog Dave stepped boldly into view and shouted:

"Hold on there! Don't shoot that dog!"

The gun came down. And Rags, glad to have reinforcements, ran over and stood at his master's side, every hair on his body bristling with defiance and loyalty.

It was a bad situation, but Dave tried to make the best of it. He walked toward the Chinamen with what assurance he could muster and said:

"This is a private place, savvy? Private property. You fellows get out of here."

The Celestials conversed among themselves for a moment, and then the one with the gun stepped forward and asked——

"What for you make um go 'way?"

Dave thought his bluff had started to work, and attempted to carry it further.

"This Government property!" he cried. "Soldiers back here!" He pointed his thumb back over his shoulder. "You want um me call soldiers?"

That was the worst thing he could possibly have said. If he had told the Chinamen that he was there alone hunting or fishing or prospecting, or even if he had told them the truth about being the single survivor of a shipwreck, they would probably not have molested him. But the moment he mentioned soldiers he threw them into a panic. Excited jabbering followed the announcement, and then the gun was aimed again; but this time not at the dog.

Dave's hands went up in a hurry.

"Go easy with that gun!" he cried. "Don't shoot! There's nobody here but me! No soldiers—I'm all alone! I was just kidding you!"

But the Chinamen couldn't take a joke. They seized Dave, who made no resistance, and soon had his hands tied behind his back. But Rags was no pacifist, he was not in favor of submission even to a superior force—he was for fighting the matter out then and there. And Dave had about all he could do to keep the dog from tearing into his captors.

While the Chinamen were holding another council of war Dave had a chance to look over the party. He noted that there were ten of them, and then discovered that the four he had taken for women because they were dressed as such, were obviously men. He did not doubt that they had some reason for wearing such an awkward disguise, but he did not attempt to figure it out, as his first concern was to lead his captors away from the treasure.

But before he could formulate any sort of a plan the man with the gun stepped out from among his fellows and came toward Dave as he said—

"You holla—me shoot! Savvy?"

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"Me savvy," muttered Dave. "No holler."

"Where you catch um soldier? Savvy?"

"I savvy all right," answered Dave humbly, "but there isn't a soldier anywhere 'round here, John. I was just trying to bluff you."

"You lie!" screamed the Chinaman excitedly as he brandished the gun before the boy's face. "Where you catch um soldier?"

Dave realized the futility of trying to convince his captors by argument, and at the same time he saw a chance to lead them away from his treasure.

"I'm all alone," he said earnestly. "You follow along me; I'll show you there isn't another person on this island."

He led the way toward the lagoon with the Chinamen cautiously following a short distance behind.

"You lun—me shoot!" the man with the gun threatened as they went along.

But Dave did not run; he took the utmost pains to walk very deliberately, as he did not doubt that the Chinaman would like nothing better than an excuse to shoot him in the back.

The Chinamen were much excited by the automobile and the litter 'round it, but when they caught sight of the rifles and the ammunition at the scene of the shipwreck Dave thought that his last moment had surely come. For the man with the gun became so hysterical that it seemed as if his finger *must* press the trigger.

"L-look h-here, boys," Dave managed to stammer out at last. "There was a big boat out there on the water. And the big boat went down! Everybody was drowned except me! Me and the dog!"

The Celestials deemed this story worthy of some high-voiced discussion at one side. Then the man with the gun came up and pressed his weapon against Dave's breast.

"You soldier?" he demanded.

Dave quickly shook his head.

"No," he replied. "Me just poor sailor-boy."

After some further parley Dave with Rags close at his heels was led back to the scene of his capture, where the gun-barrel was again thrust against his breast as the Chinaman demanded—

"Where you come from?"

"Why, I was back up here on the rocks," replied Dave with a careless toss of his head.

"Go back on locks!" ordered the Chinaman. "We come along you."

Dave demurred.

"Why, there's nothing on the rocks," he said.

"Go back on locks!" the Chinaman insisted. "I shoot!"

Dave started to lead them off to one side, but there was no place to go except to the entrance of the cave. As he came up to it he pointed carelessly and said:

"When you came I went in there and hid. But when the dog growled, why, I came out again."

"Soldier hide um in there?" asked the man with the gun. "Go in. I follow along you."

"No, there's no soldier around here anywhere," said Dave as he stepped into the cave and glanced 'round with apparent carelessness. "There's nothing in here. I was just hiding." And he stepped out again and made as if to walk away.

But the Chinaman preferred to see for himself. He went cautiously over to the entrance and peered inside. He could see at a glance that the cave was small—and then something back in a dark corner attracted his attention. He became more bold and ventured inside. He struck a match. And then he gave a cry that brought the others shuffling after him.

And while a cackling that sounded not unlike a flock of geese was taking place inside the cave, Dave was standing outside on the verge of tears.

"It's all off, Rags," he murmured. "They've found our gold, and we did need it so much."

By the combined efforts of the party the little old chest was brought outside and set on the ground; and before the longing eyes of the boy the treasure was equally divided among the excited Celestials. It taxed their pockets to capacity. And if there had been any doubt in Dave's mind about the manhood of the Chinese, who were wearing female attire, the sureness with which they hitched up their skirts and plunged their hands into their pants pockets would instantly have removed it.

After the division of the treasure had been made, a great powwow arose among the Chinamen. Dave knew that it had to do largely with him, for he realized that the disposal of a mere castaway is a different matter from the disposition of a person who has been robbed of a fortune.

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AT FIRST they took him over on the south side of the island, where he was astonished to find that they had a camp at which they had apparently been staying for some time, not far from a protected inlet. But after a while he was led back to the lagoon and securely tied to the automobile after his feet had been bound with a piece of his own rope. Then all the Chinamen withdrew except one brutal-looking fellow who was left on guard.

And as the rest of the party passed out of sight Dave began to look him over appraisingly. He wondered whether he could handle the fellow if he should manage to get loose, and he concluded that his chances were good, especially if he could get in the first blow, as he felt sure his opponent would be hampered by the calico wrapper he was wearing, and by the cheap imitation of a Gainsborough hat on his head.

But why had they brought him over here, and what were they going to do with him? Perhaps he could get some information out of his guard.

"What for you bring me over here?" he asked at length, smiling pleasantly.

"Shut up!" replied the guard impassively.

"What for you tie me up?" Dave persisted good-humoredly. "I couldn't run very far on this island."

"Shut up!" This time the guard put a little more feeling into his reply.

For a moment Dave was silent. Then he asked, "You wouldn't go away and leave me tied up like this, would you?"

The guard jumped to his feet, caught up a stick of timber that lay near by, and drew it back as if for a blow, while he again repeated in no friendly tone his entire English vocabulary—

"Shut up!"

Dave said nothing further, but he did some very serious thinking. It came to him with telling force that dead men have the reputation of being very close-mouthed and that his only chance to keep from having such a reputation thrust on him was to find some way to protect himself from his guard. It was obvious that the first step was to get his hands and feet loose.

With the coming of twilight he began to strain against the cords that bound his wrists; but they were securely tied with some sort of unbreakable Chinese cord, and the harder he strained the more uncomfortable they felt. As soon as it had become dark he tried to cut the cords by rubbing them across Rags' teeth; but Rags didn't understand, and refused to have his mouth so roughly used. When Dave persisted, the dog moved out of reach.

Several times the boy had moved his body in an attempt to get into a more comfortable position; he seemed to be sitting on a stone. Then it came to him that the hard lump had moved with each turn. He explored his hip pocket with his fingers and found a small box—the safety-razor!

Dave cautiously worked the box out on the sand and extracted a razor-blade with which he attempted to reach the cords that bound his hands. He cut his fingers, and slashed his wrists, but at last he felt something give way. He pulled gently at his hands. They were free!

Then little by little he drew his legs up close to his body and with even greater caution cut the rope that bound his feet. He had just replaced his hand behind his back when he heard three shots in quick succession, which he knew instinctively must be some sort of signal for the guard.

The boy struggled to his feet still holding his hands behind him, as his guard stood up and came toward him with the stick poised for a blow. But the blow never fell. For as the Chinaman bent forward to pick out a spot on which to land it, Dave struck him an uppercut on the jaw.

The guard went down with Dave and Rags on top of him ready to give him more of the same kind; but it was quite unnecessary. He took the count without further argument. As he lay there groaning Dave stripped off the wrapper, slipped the rubber band of the Gainsborough hat from under his chin, and put them on himself.

He had started for the other side of the island before it occurred to him that the guard might come to and follow. So he turned back and bound him securely hand and foot. It was while he was doing this that he heard the jingle of money and recalled that the Chinaman had several pockets full of gold-pieces that did not belong to him. So Dave emptied them into his own, caught up the rope he had tied to Rags' collar, and started across the island on a run.

He found the camp deserted, but hearing voices farther on continued cautiously toward the little inlet he had noticed in the

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afternoon. While he was still some distance away he was able to discern the dim outlines of a launch. And as he came nearer he could hear a gruff voice saying:

"Where the —— is that other China-boy, Wong? We can't wait around here all night! Them Hip Sings is likely to come sneakin' up on us any minute!"

"No! Hip Sing no come," exclaimed a voice Dave recognized as that of the man who had been so free with the gun earlier in the day.

"You bet yer life they'll come!" returned the gruff voice. "A China-boy fisherman spotted you boys and squealed on you. He was too foxy to tell the police, though. He was afraid you'd give *them* the slip. But he knew that if them Hip Sings ever catched you on this island it 'u'd be 'good-night.' Now, you see what comes of not wearin' them female clothes. I told you to make the boys keep 'em on every minute!"

"Uh-uh," cried Wong earnestly. "No, Captain! Uh-uh! China-boy wear um dless alla time. Evely night—evely day. No take um off atall."

"Well," grunted the captain, "he spotted you anyhow, and squealed to the Hips that you was here hidin' out. But somebody tipped off the ol' man, and he sent me out here to get you before the Hips got a chance to beat 'im to it and shoot you all up. He thinks you'll be a dern sight safer right there in Chinytown till this here tong war is over. A bunch of the boys has come down from 'Frisco to help your side out."

"Awlight, Capta'n," said Wong promptly. "Me leddy go along you now."

"Then we ain't goin' to wait no longer fer that fool boy?" asked the captain. "What'd he go back fer, anyhow?"

"Go back catch um hat," lied Wong promptly.

Dave thought the time had come for him to arrive, so he slipped back a short distance, and then came running.

"Hurry up there, you China-boy!" called the captain when he heard the boy coming. "You come pretty near gettin' left."

Dave panted audibly as he came up beside the boat and clambered aboard with Rags at his heels.

"Hey, what's this?" growled the captain. "A dorg! W'at the —— you doin' with a dorg?"

Dave felt that some reply was necessary, so he raised his voice to a high falsetto and said in the best imitation of his former guard that he could command—

"Shut up!"

A cackle of shrill laughter followed, during which Dave crowded in among the Celestials gathered at the bow of the boat and tried to lose his identity. But the captain did not press the matter farther. He was in too much of a hurry to be held up by a dog. He bawled an order to the engineer. The engine began to chug, and the boat drew slowly away from the shore.

THEN the captain turned his attention to the passengers.

"Hey, Wong," he ordered, "you tell them China-boys to set two and two; and if any one flashes a searchlight on us, they're to spoon like ——. They's been a cutter hangin' 'round here off and on fer a week and they're likely to pick us up and take a squint at us. You savvy that, Wong? Tell the boys."

"Me savvy two and two, yes; no savvy 'spoon'," said Wong.

"Spoon?" cried the captain. "Don't you know what 'spoon' means? They want to act like lovers, every couple of 'em. They want to hug and kiss and all like that. Y' savvy that?"

"Me savvy," replied Wong, and he turned and harangued his countrymen earnestly for some moments.

"Y'see, Wong," the captain explained when the Chinaman had finished speaking. "We're a picnic party, and we're out fer a little boat-ride. Now, there's a *reg'lar* picnic party on the way out right this minute. And as soon as we pick them up they'll douse their lights, and we'll light up; and then we'll go right plumb up the channel jus' 's if we was them. Then they'll cruise 'round out here fer a couple of hours, and then they'll come slidin' back into harbor all lit up like a church. And if a cutter should happen to pick 'em up—why, what have they done? They're a perfectly respectable lot of young fellers and girls who don't know they're bein' made monkeys of. They're bony-fidy passengers, payin' their fare at that!"

Wong chuckled understandingly and said—

"Me savvy."

Meanwhile, in order to avoid suspicion, Dave had tied Rags to a seat-brace and had moved as far away from the dog as possible.

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He had crowded in between two China-boys at the extreme bow, and was just congratulating himself on the success that had attended him thus far, when one of his seatmates spoke to him in Chinese. For the first time he began to realize that he had rushed into a dangerous situation.

He had come to the launch without any definite plan, and without stopping to consider what he would do after he got there. His one thought had been that his money was on the boat and his only chance to recover it lay in staying with it. And this chance appeared to have vanished before they had gone half a mile from the shore. For Dave did not know even a single word of Chinese.

Of course he made no reply. To have done so would have meant immediate discovery, and discovery would undoubtedly have been followed by a brutal death. So he sat perfectly still and feigned sleep while his heart pounded and a peculiar coldness came over the region of his spine.

The Chinaman spoke again more loudly than before, and accompanied his remarks by a vigorous nudge with his elbow. Dave still feigned sleep; it was the only thing he could think of. Then one of the China-boys sitting opposite took up the refrain, and Dave thought the beginning of the end had come. But the captain intervened in time to save him.

"Hey there! You China-boys!" he cried as he made his way forward. "Cut out that —— racket. Wong, tell them boys to shut up. If a fishin'-boat or a cutter should be near enough to hear them chatterin' that Chink-talk the stuff would be off."

Wong hastily gave the order to his countrymen in their native tongue, but the captain was not satisfied. He came stumbling forward through the darkness to impress on them more forcibly the necessity for silence.

"I don't want to hear another peep out of you fellers," he began. "Wong, you tell 'em——"

"Gr-r-r-yow!" This was from Rags, who resented having the captain tread on him.

"W'at the ——. Git out o' here! Throw that —— dog overboard! Git out——"

Then came a growl, a scuffle, the sound of tearing cloth, some fragmentary oaths, and a quick retreat. And not until the captain was well out of the danger zone did he stop. But when he did he expressed himself very freely on the subject of dogs, and ordered the fool China-boy who had brought that —— dorg aboard to sling him overboard and do it quick.

"Tell 'im that, Wong, and don't be all night about it," he concluded angrily.

Dave made up his mind that he would die before he would obey the order or let any one else obey it; but before he was put to the test the captain countermanded:

"Never mind, Wong. Never mind," he cautioned. "We're too late. Cut out the Chink-talk—light ahoy."

He picked up a large megaphone, and waiting until he was within hailing distance, shouted—

"Shi-i-ip aho-o-oy!"

"Aho-o-oy yourself!" came the cheerful answer. "We're the *Roamer*, of San Diego, out for a good time!"

"Then light out fer it!" bawled the captain.

Instantly every light on the *Roamer* was extinguished.

"Is that lightin' out enough for you?" came the query, followed by a shout of laughter from the passengers on the *Roamer*.

"'S all right, *Roamer*," called the captain, and he forthwith displayed his own lights, which had not up to this time been shown.

Nothing more was heard from the *Roamer* except snatches of song and laughter, which gradually became more and more indistinct, and finally died out altogether. And for a time all went well on the tong warriors' launch. Then suddenly a blinding flash of light swept them. Every object on board emerged from the cover of darkness and stood out with startling distinctness.

"Spoon, you China-boys!" cried the captain in a subdued tone. "Spoon for yer life! Tell 'em, Wong! Tell 'em! They ain't *half* doin' it!"

Dave had about half made up his mind that if they were hailed by a cutter he would rise up and call lustily for help. But when the flash came, it came so unexpectedly, and was so disconcerting, that before he realized what he was doing he had thrown his arms 'round the Celestial next to him and had begun to hug him with every appearance of affection. And then, as suddenly as it had come, the blinding light had gone.

AS THE darkness settled over them again a phonograph somewhere in the rear of the launch burst forth with "Tipperary," in which the captain and the engineer joined heartily. And after a

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little Dave was able to make out a dark smudge on the ocean, which he took to be the cutter. But it came no nearer. The launch had passed muster.

They were just going over the bar when they were picked up by a search-light from Point Loma; but after a moment of desperate spooning, this, too, was turned off and they passed into the channel. Off Fort Rosecrans they were again submitted to scrutiny by the searchlights, and again they passed muster. Then they proceeded up the bay without further molestation.

Dave no longer had any fears for his safety, for he was confident that when they were once on shore he could easily give his companions the slip. But he was most apprehensive about the recovery of his money if they should once get out of his sight with it. The police might get the men, but he was sure they would never get the money.

He made up his mind that if a landing should be made at a dock where there were people about he would raise a hue and cry the moment they touched. But if it should be made at one of the dark, unfrequented wharves, which he thought more likely, he would keep quiet until the party reached a place where there was some one to hear. And if they scattered, what then? He concluded that he would in that case probably lose them all but one—and he quickly decided that that one should not be the man with the gun.

The launch held to midchannel until it had passed all the passenger docks. Then it changed its course and headed for the dark maze of lumber wharves on the upper bay. As it threaded its way slowly in among the lumber barges and floats Wong gathered his warriors about him for some final whispered instructions.

In the jostling that ensued Dave was pushed against Wong in such a way that he came in contact with a heavy object in the Chinaman's coat pocket that he felt sure must be his gun. And instantly the thought flashed through the boy's mind that if he could only get possession of the gun he could hold up the entire party and relieve them of his money before they had time to scatter.

He was trying to get up his nerve to make a grab for the weapon when the man at the helm misjudged the location of the float on which the landing was to be made and rammed the bow of the launch against it with enough force to throw all hands off their balance. When Dave felt the shock he lurched against Wong a great deal harder than was really necessary—and when he recovered his equilibrium he had the gun tucked inside his coat. In another he had leaped to the float with Rags at his heels, scrambled up on the dock, and darted behind a pile of lumber standing near by.

Not an audible word was spoken, but in some mysterious way Wong gave the alarm. And as Dave peered out from his cover he saw the Chinamen come swarming out of the launch in pursuit. The first to clamber up on the dock was met by the order—

"Hands up!"

He did not obey for the very good reason that he did not "savvy." And because he did not savvy he went down with a bullet through his shoulder. And as he fell another took his place.

"Hands up!" ordered Dave.

A pair of hands went up. They were Wong's. And in one of them a long knife gleamed.

"Drop that knife!" demanded Dave.

The knife clattered to the dock.

"Tell the rest of the boys to drop their knives and stick up their hands!" commanded Dave. "I'll plug the first man who fails."

Wong interpreted the order. And although the next China-boy to get on the dock raised his hands he did not drop his knife until a bullet came along and took away the knife and two of his fingers as well. The others obeyed orders without any prompting from the artillery. And not until the last China-boy had clambered up from the float did Dave notice that in the excitement the launch had drawn quietly off a short distance from the dock, where it was standing by, ready to make a getaway or lend the tong boys a hand as the occasion might require. But he cared nothing for the launch or the men in it. All he wanted was his money, and he lost no time in making this plain to Wong.

"Look here, Wong," he said, "you boys have got my gold, and I want it. Take it out of your pockets and pile it up there on the dock in front of you; and then you can go. Do you savvy that?"

"Gold? No savvy gold," replied Wong craftily, playing for time, and trying to

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hold the boy's attention; for Dave had not taken the precaution to count the China-boys lined up before him, or he would have noted that one was strangely missing.

"I mean money!" Dave cried as he slapped one of his pockets suggestively. "You savvy money, don't you?"

At that moment Rags gave a growl and sprang at something at the farther end of the lumber pile, and Dave felt a dull blow in the back. Then for no reason at all he felt himself falling forward; and when he saw Wong leap toward him he made one last effort and pulled the trigger.

A far-away report was the only result. Then he knew no more.

WHEN he recovered two policemen were bending over him.

"Did you get 'em?" he asked.

"We got one. The dog had 'im by the throat. How many was there?"

"Nine!" gasped the boy as he struggled up. "Did they all get away but one?"

"Now just lay quiet, boy, and you'll be all right. You got a nasty jab in the back, and if you move 'round too much it'll get to leakin' again. The stretcher'll be here in a minute."

"Don't let 'em get away!" moaned the boy. "Don't let 'em get away! They've got all my money——"

"Money? How much was they? Who took it? Tell us all about it."

Although terribly weakened by loss of blood, the boy rallied.

"Those Chinamen stole my money—" he gasped out. "I shot one of 'em over by the float—you'll find him there now with my gold in his pockets—knives on the dock—a pile of 'em——"

One of the officers took a flashlight and went over to investigate; but he came back shaking his head.

"There's blood over there, but most likely it's his own. There's no body though, and no gold. I'm 'fraid the poor devil's seein' things."

"No, no!" gasped the boy with unexpected strength. "I'm not seeing things. The others must have dragged him away—but he was there—and his pockets were full of my money——"

"He's dreamin'."

"No—I'm not dreaming—feel in my own pockets and you'll see—they're full of gold——"

The officer ran his hand into the boy's pockets.

"Nuthin' doin'," he reported. "He's off his head sure 'nough."

The stretcher arrived, and as the boy was being placed upon it he roused himself.

"Don't take me away till you get 'em!" he begged. "They can't be far off——"

His voice drifted off into nothingness.

"What does he mean?" asked a stretcher-man.

"Aw, he's nuts," replied the motorcycle officer who had been first on the scene. "He thinks he's been shootin' up the whole Chink army, and he ain't even got a gun." Then noting the boy's shoes under the bright light of the electric torches, he added —"And even his feet don't mate!"

"Well, somebody was doing some tall shooting 'round here according to the yard watchman who turned in the alarm," returned the stretcher-man.

"Mebbe so; but we couldn't find any gun, and what this boy's got is a knife-wound."

During this discussion Rags came out of the darkness and laid his nose in his master's hand. At the touch Dave roused again.

"Rags—must know—where they are—" he gasped. "Rags! Go get 'em——"

The dog instantly made a dash for a pile of lumber a short distance away, and began to jump at it in a futile attempt to climb it.

"Well, that's funny," said the stretcher-man, "look what that dog's doin'. S'pose there is some one up on that pile?"

The motorcycle officer was doubtful, but guessed he'd better take a peek. He clambered up and flashed his light—and then fell all the way to the dock.

"Great guns!" he cried. "There's a hundred of 'em up there!"

AN HOUR later Dave Colton, wrapped up like a mummy to stop the flow of blood from a long, surface knife-wound, had the pleasure of identifying the nine China-boys before the night sergeant and of seeing them separated from his gold pieces. And as the officers drew forth from Wong's pockets handful after handful of the money, Dave could not refrain from asking—

"Now do you savvy money, Wong?"

Wong smiled bitterly.

"Me savvy money," he replied, and then giving Rags a sidelong glance, he added—"But no savvy dog!"

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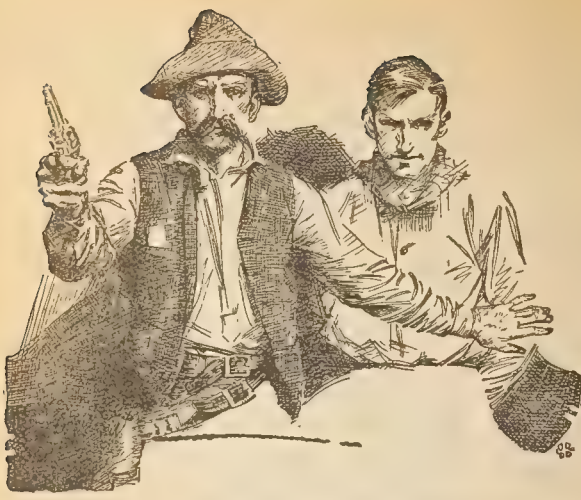

GUILTY by

Robert J Pearsall

Author of "Muchacho of Tumbling Water," "The Test of Umalgi," etc.

THE rural telephone relayed the news swiftly from ranch to ranch. Immediately, all roads led to the scene of the crime. This was a certain abrupt curve on the mountain road, bordered on one side by a narrow, level field, on the other by a nearly perpendicular cliff. Already about a dozen men were gathered there, cowboys, ranchhands, farmers. Every few minutes some one else would come up, on foot, in a buggy, on horseback. Their excited voices died down as they came into the presence of death, and the sound of the group was an increasing, angry undertone.

Clark, the game-warden, who had found the body, stood listening to that undertone thoughtfully. He knew these men; they were strong, just, but passionate, and the dead man had been a friend of theirs. Faulty, stubborn, by all accounts with an overweening sense of property right; but a life-long friend and neighbor, for all that. He was a very old man, too; and that added to the manner of his death a peculiar atrocity.

He had been shot through the head while driving home from Elkhorn in his automobile the night before. He had fallen from his machine; the machine had plunged into the cliff, sheered off, and turned turtle against the fence. Ostensibly the motive was robbery. It was known he was bringing home with him the amount of his month's pay-roll, about four hundred dollars, and this was gone.

But to that motive the growing crowd, pitching about in a turmoil of low-toned execration and fierce curiosity to find the right man upon whom to fasten the crime, easily added another. It was Graves that voiced it first. Even before that, however, across the wireless trail that ran from mind to mind the suspicion had leaped. The response to Graves' suggestion was so instant and unanimous that each man soon conceived the idea to be his own.

"It was the nester."

"Sure —— him!"

"They say he threatened this, said he'd fix any one that monkeyed with his dam. The yellow cur! This was his idea, was it!"

"Lord, I'd sure hate to be in his boots when the Marble boys get hold of him. Where are they, anyway?"

"They were ridin' the range. They'll be here."

"Say, didn't you find nothin'? Wasn't there no clue?" This from a newcomer, anxiously, of Clark.

Clark replied in the negative. It was an untruth, but he felt himself justified. Clark was a tall, lean man, with wide-set, far-seeing eyes, by instinct a woodsman, by occupation a follower of trails. He stood nearest the body, and held the others back from it mainly by force of his quiet presence.

"Sure, I phoned in to Elkhorn. Or had Graves do it. Graves, there." This in reply to another question.

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"Yes," corroborated Graves. "It'll be an hour or so before the sheriff gets out, though."

Plain as though he had worded it was the suggestion that much might be done before the arrival of the sheriff. It was not the first such suggestion Graves had put out. Clark studied him reflectively.

Graves was attired much like the rest of them, yet there was something about him that set him apart from the farmers, like an indelible brand. A native of this place, he had lived most of his life away from it, returning only recently to his brother's rather inadequate farm. So it was that no one knew him very well. He was a middle-aged man, well put together and wiry, with a rather dark, inscrutable face, crossed with heavy eyebrows and a straight, well-trimmed mustache, like two black bars. His voice was suave and confidential.

Once his eyes shifted, as though unconsciously, sideways into the field that edged the road. A very old oak stood there, its gnarled wide-spreading branches showing specter-like through the thin morning fog that covered everything. Graves' eyes came back with a jerk.

"By the way," he inquired of the man standing nearest him, "what sort of a night was it? Bright moon, eh?"

"Naw, no moon at all, and dark as pitch. Why?"

"He must 've been infernally sure of his marksmanship," said Graves, "to aim at a man's head on a dark night."

"We was just talkin' about that."

"It's a good point to remember, anyway," said Graves.

Whereupon the fact instantly gained significance. The countrymen felt a queer, reluctant deference toward Graves, quite apart from liking. There was a hint of mystery about him that fascinated even while it repelled.

"Well, boys," said a tall cowboy with a flaming red face, "palaverin' ain't goin' to get our man. What say we move?"

At that suggestion, Clark shot a swift glance, not at the speaker, but at Graves. He saw a quick light leap into Graves' eyes, an eager, avidly welcoming look. It passed almost instantly, leaving Graves' face as inscrutable as before, but it had been there. Clark's own deliberative eyes half closed, as he filed away finally two facts. Whatever the cause, Graves wanted very much the seizure of the youth called the nester. Whatever the cause, he didn't care to openly urge it.

Instant response from the others greeted the cowboy's words.

"Sure, we'll go get the son of a gun."

"Save the sheriff the trouble, eh?"

"If he hasn't beat it, we will."

"Well, who's going?"

Mobility came upon the crowd, and it seemed about to depart in an eager body, but Clark interfered.

"Here, it won't take all of us." His was one of those rare voices that express in its very quietness the strength of the man behind it. "You, Graves, and you—" to the insistent cowboy, and he picked out half a dozen others, the latter steady, reliable men all.

But while he was doing this came the first open hint of the thing that most of the others contemplated as yet only as a remote possibility.

"If we get the dope on the murdering hound, we might save the courts a bit of trouble, too," muttered some one savagely.

And again Clark saw that eager light—a very evil light it appeared to him now—pass over Graves' dark face.

He noted it; he noted the dead silence that followed the words, the uneasy stirring and low muttering that followed the silence. The remark shocked the crowd; nevertheless, it was as seed that had been sown. Some of the younger men began to tell each other of little things old man Marble had done for them, how he had loaned them money, given them work when he needed no workmen, a host of small private benefactions. Under all this talk there was the rumble of anger, and a certain veiled and sinister questioning. Each man knew of himself that he would start nothing—but what of the others? Anticipatory excitement laid its hand upon the crowd, and made it dangerous.

Clark's brows drew together, but he said nothing, and led his detail away.

"What the dickens! Ain't we ridin'?" asked the cowboy, in a tone of dismay.

"Too many fences to cross," said Clark. "And a grain field. Law against it, anyway, which was part of the nester's trouble, I reckon. Come on."

They started up the road, marching in a sort of rude order, very silently. To their

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right, showing dimly through the mist, were the forest-dotted hills of the great Marble holding, rising in billow upon billow of mostly unused land. It was in the middle of this holding, two miles from the highway, that the man whom they sought had built his home.

Just before they left the road for the fields, Ed and Lin Marble, sons of the murdered man, joined them. Boys, they were called, but the younger had a man's strength; they were heavily armed, white-faced and very nearly speechless, and there was death in their eyes.

NO SENSE of impending danger warned Jeff Stewart that morning. He awoke early, breakfasted in the open, his mind on his day's work; and had just started away from the cabin when the dozen men rounded it.

He was the nester, an opprobrious title, hardly deserved. For it was an ancient urge, the age-old heritage of his race, that had drawn him away from his clerk's desk out into the wide spaces, in search of what the city could not give him, land of his own and a home. His was the pioneer's instinct, but the last frontier was gone, so he had doubled back, searching through his long Summer's vacation each year for free Government land that might be made productive. The third year he found it; he filed his claim, built his cabin, and went to work.

Brains as well as luck had entered the game. He had seen an opportunity where others had seen only waste land, drought-smitten the greater part of the year. By damming a stream that tumbled across one corner of his homestead, he got water for irrigation. Shallow ditches now stretched from that dam across ten level acres, green with his first crop. Next year he hoped to plant and water three times that acreage. The rest of his quarter-section was largely valueless, ridges dense with brake; but to Jeff, even so much spelled independence.

He had been a tall and gangly youth when he had come to the place, soft-muscled and spectacled. But if he had put much into the land of brain and muscle, the land had also put much into him. With such zestful life as he had never dreamed of, the hard work and harder fare had filled his body; in his true environment at last, the natural out-of-doors man had come into his own of strength and happiness. Until he had felt old man Marble's hand closing relentlessly over his claim, he had habitually labored with a song on his lips and in his heart.

For to Marble, who had been murdered, Jeff was by a not uncommon mode of reasoning simply an intruder to be gotten rid of. Marble had come into the country fifty years ago; by homesteading and by buying homesteaders' rights he had gotten hold of section after section; his land completely surrounded Jeff's, and he had pastured Jeff's homestead all his life. By habituated use, which surely lies at the foundation of all sense of property right, he had come to regard it as his own. And so he had set himself to asserting, by any means, what his stubborn old soul felt to be his rights.

Only two simple steps were necessary at that. No man without influence and money could have accomplished them, but Marble had influence and money. First Marble had planted a lower field to grain, then had secured an injunction forbidding Jeff to use the road he had opened down the hills and across that field to the highway. The court had held another way, over the brake-covered hills, to be practicable; but then the court had never seen the land, and was a boyhood friend of Marble's, besides.

But the dam, the water, the irrigation system, was the really vital point in Jeff's defense. Before the same court was pending another injunction, pleading for Marble a prior right. The water had poured unused down the cañon over the Marble land for a thousand years, but the court would take no recognizance of that. A higher court would probably reverse the verdict, but it would take money to carry the case to a higher court. And Jeff's savings, almost to his last dollar, had been expended in improving his claim.

Jeff was desperate. The loss of his land meant more to him than a property loss. It was the tumbling of a dream, the destruction of a hope, the reversal of a lifetime. And it was the ruin of something he had created and come to love. So, being young, he had talked hotly in the matter, had said much more than he meant, and that in terms capable of further misinterpretation.

Especially had he unbosomed himself to

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a sympathetic man named Graves, who had happened around rather frequently of late. Afterward he had been sorry for that. He had not liked Graves.

So things stood on the morning of that fateful visit. Alone with his angry thoughts, worrying constantly, Jeff's nerves had perhaps grown taut. And the appearance of the silent, grave-faced group was so unexpected that it was no wonder he started when he saw them, and stared at them wide-eyed, to their suspicious minds a picture of fright.

Perhaps fright did enter his mind at the white faces of the Marble boys. He knew them for enemies, but the deadly hatred that filled their faces now was new and unexplainable. But when no one responded to his greeting, when they edged up on him, looking at him suspiciously, curiously, he asked curtly enough—

"Well, what's up?"

"We want to have a little look around, that's all," said Clark, easily.

"What for? What's the matter?"

"I'm the game-warden," equivocated Clark.

He showed his badge, and with the word passed in front of Jeff and entered the door of the cabin.

The others trailed in after him, save Ed and Lin Marble. These waited, saying no word, their eyes fixed venomously on Jeff. Jeff heard peculiar sounds inside the cabin, and started in to see what was happening. The Marble boys followed him closely.

The trespassers had mapped out their work on the way up the hills, and they lost no time. Clark had stripped the bed; others were feeling above the rafters, were searching the fireplace and the chimney, were fumbling in the interstices between the logs and redwood slabs that supported the roof. They worked thoroughly and in such grim earnest that a chill crept to Jeff's heart. An alien, he; and he realized it now: what did he, the city-bred, know of these men? What did they suspect, and what would they do?

Graves picked up a small-bore rifle.

"Where's your other gun?" he asked.

"I haven't any other," replied Jeff in a mixture of anger and fear. "What's all this about?"

No one answered him.

The floor was of short, redwood slabs, lightly nailed down. At Clark's orders, Ed Marble and a rancher named Muhlally went to work with a hatchet and ax, tearing it up. Jeff protested—

"Here, stop that!"

"Better take it easy, young man," said Clark.

"What the devil is this? You said you were game-warden. Is it——"

"No, it ain't game we're lookin' for. Scatter outside, the rest of you, and see what you can turn up."

They all obeyed except Lin Marble. His eyes, flaming like a garnet, hate-filled, never left Jeff. Jeff stood for a minute, stupefied. He faced Clark; behind him the nails creaked out of their sockets. The sound of his work undone filled him with rage.

"Then what—" he began, savagely.

"*That*," cried Clark sharply, starting forward and pointing over Jeff's shoulder.

JEFF half turned, then stopped dead in his tracks, paralyzed with astonishment, with astonishment so real and great that it was strange any one could credit him with acting a part.

With a distorted and twitching face, Ed Marble had got to his feet, holding in his shaking hands a heavy hunting rifle. A rifle with, as all saw in a flashing glance, an electric spotlight strapped to the stock of it, just behind the rear sight.

"But that—that isn't mine."

"It was hid under your floor," said Clark.

Muhlally stepped forward, tilted the gun up, and gave one look at the butt.

"Guess you're right," he drawled. "Some galoot stole that gun from me about three days ago. Remember me speakin' of it, Clark? But that little get-'em-in-the-dark gadget wasn't on it then."

They crowded around, and on that spotlight, which paralleled the sights and made accurate close-range shooting as possible by night as by day, they found Jeff Stewart's initials, scratched deep in the nickel plate.

"But that *is* mine. I don't know——"

Ed Marble worked the bolt swiftly, leveled the gun at Jeff, and pulled the trigger. But Clark struck the muzzle up, and the bullet tore through the roof.

"Hanging's a worse death, anyway," sneered Ed Marble.

Then in the doorway appeared Graves, holding up to the view of all five fluttering greenbacks.

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"We found part of the money anyway," he announced. "Fifty dollars of it. Hid under a rock, it was. He's the man."

Could there longer be any doubt of it? Plain to all was Jeff's triple motive: revenge, money, to save his land from Marble's machinations. What further evidence was needed than the discovery of the murderously equipped weapon and part of the loot, both hidden on Jeff's premises? Courts and twelve quiet men have sometimes been satisfied with less.

Abandoning further search, they pelted the bewildered youth with flaming interrogations. They took his knowledge of the crime and his guilt for granted, and tried to browbeat him into confession. They were twelve against one, twelve whose attitudes ranged from the deadly and uncalculating anger of the Marble boys and the cold seeming conviction of Graves, to the quiet thoughtfulness of Clark, who watched and listened with never a change on his seamed, strong face.

Jeff was merely confused at first; why they all raged against him was beyond his comprehension. But his confusion was so overlaid with fear that it passed with most of them as a sign of guilt. His fierce denial, after he discovered with what he was accused, served him no better. But Clark stood watching him with eyes that weighed and judged.

"A plain case, eh?" said Muhlally presently to Clark.

"It's too plain," growled Clark. "That's it, it's too —— plain."

Muhlally thought he read a doubt in Clark's tone, but later he decided he had been mistaken. For if Clark was not convinced of the nester's guilt, why should he have taken him back to that dark spot in the road where waited the crowd that a single spark might transform into something worse? There was a good strong jail in Elkhorn, and surely that would have been the place for him.

FOR some time Justice had limped haltingly in Elkhorn County, on delaying and vagrant feet. Many crimes, of cattle and sheep stealing, of burglary—and one of murder and one even worse crime — had gone unpunished. Mainly their perpetrators had not been caught; but in at least two recent instances, even when they seemed safe for conviction, they had escaped. Perhaps the proof had not been strong enough against them; but the public laid the blame on technicalities and the ineptitude of the court. And that masculine section of the public which received Jeff and his guard had had time to mull these things over, not wisely, perhaps, but well.

By now the little group had increased until it was a solid mass, filling the road. A number of itinerant hop-pickers had joined it. These had just been discharged; they had money, and consequently liquor; mischief-makers they, and ripe for trouble. Added virulence had crept into the retelling of the nester's feud with the murdered man; Jeff's guilt was taken almost for granted; and the fresh evidence the new-comers brought was hardly needed.

The crowd broke to meet them, opened and eddied around them. Clark found himself with his prisoner in the middle of it, a little clear space around them. Muhlally, to whom he had entrusted the rifle and money, stood near. The rest of the men were busy spreading their news, which news was like tinder to a flame, as the visible evidence in Muhlally's hands was like a taunt.

Short, scattered exclamations, like pistol-shots, began to come from the crowd.

" —— him!"

"He's the man, all right."

"Sure; what more d'ye want?"

"Guilty as the devil, the cowardly hound."

To Jeff, awakening to his peril, trying to look defiant, but weak and sick within, these exclamations seemed to cut away knife-like his hold upon life.

Graves was very active among the men; and as Clark saw him passing here and there, talking, talking, a queer cold anger came to his face. The Marble boys were effectively silent, their silence a challenge to their neighbors: "What are you going to do about it?" And presently the answer of the crowd developed, a low, inarticulate growl.

Coming upon that, Clark's words seemed almost childish:

"You boys don't want to do anything rash, now. We must have law and order. I'm here to protect the prisoner until the sheriff comes."

"Is that so?" said some one grimly.

But immediately a thin laugh followed,

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and spread. The crowd sensed a joke in his attitude. Why, then, had he brought the prisoner there?

But still they did nothing, for they were yet a crowd; and they even made way for the two as Clark edged to one side of the road, until Jeff stood with his back against the solid wall of rock, with Clark before him.

And then the unifying chord was struck.

"Remember—" said some one; and the thing that was mentioned was that even fouler crime than this, a crime that, above all others, rouses true men to blood-lust.

Swift as fire in dry grass the notion spread of a sure connection between that affair and this. Thus the mob was born. Clark saw its birth. A gust of passion swept over it, and suddenly it was like a beast, its voice a snarl, its enmassed mind and body driven by the lash of a one supreme emotion, a great anger. This is the strength of a mob, that the individual is lost and swept away in it. On its hundred feet it swayed forward, and the quiet country road was suddenly hideous with brutal desire as a torture chamber.

It was strange that a look like satisfaction flashed across Clark's face. But no less swift was the upward leap of his revolver; and his face was so hard with determination that the front of the mob, astonished at his expression, wavered and halted.

"You wait a bit," said Clark steadily. "I've got something to say."

There was pressure in the rear, with the result that the men in front were crowded closer, whether they would or not. Clark shifted his weapon.

"If I have to fire, she goes back there," he said. And the movement stopped.

His next words were another surprise.

"I ain't goin' to argue," he said, "that the fellow that killed old man Marble hadn't ought to hang. And I ain't arguin', either, that this man didn't do it. Seems like the evidence is mighty strong against him, only it strikes me this ain't no way to do the job. Howsoever, you're fifty against one, and what you say goes, I reckon. You're all agreed, are you, that you want to do the job now?"

The composite thing that the crowd had become answered him with a roar.

"Well, then," said Clark simply, "I just hold out for appointin' an executioner, that's all. Graves, it's up to you."

"What the devil!" cried some one, in the midst of a general wave of astonishment not unmingled with suspicion.

Clark had done an unprecedented thing, and the mob scented danger to its purpose; but almost instantly it recovered itself, saw the easy way out, and began to urge Graves forward. A strange flush flooded Graves' face; he looked like a man caught in the whirl of a hundred emotions; but he came forward laggingly.

IN FRONT of Clark, he turned.

"You're all behind me in this?" he demanded harshly. "You'll all stand by me?"

The cries that answered him were loud and affirmative; but strangely enough, they had lost something of anger, and gained a trifle of abhorrence. And it was not all abhorrence for the prisoner.

Graves seemed to hesitate.

"Take him. He's yours," said Clark bruskly, and stepped aside.

Graves, evading Jeff's eyes, gripped him by the arm.

"We'll just leave him hangin' till the sheriff comes," said Clark almost cheerfully. "I'll explain to him. There won't be no trouble.

Graves appeared to consider this remark deliberately, as he considered everything else about his unique situation; but he said nothing, lifted a rope from a near-by saddle-horn, and led Jeff Stewart across the road.

Jeff did not resist. He felt it would be unmanly to resist. He stood off, as it were, and admired himself for the calmness with which he walked to death. Another part of him knew he deserved no admiration, for he was numb with fear, mind and body, and moved as though in a dream.

They all clambered over the fence, close together. There seemed a peculiar desire upon them to crowd up, to herd, to feel for each other's elbows. But withal, they hung back, and a little clear space intervened between them and Graves. And when they saw how invitingly the old, bearded oak spread its branches, their pace slackened a little more, as though they recoiled from the imminence of the event. But they kept on, suddenly determined.

They were astonished to see Graves, when *his* eyes fell on the oak, stop short, as

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though an unexpected precipice had opened before his feet. They caught sight of a surprisingly pallid profile as he glanced sideways toward it. Only that one startled glance, and then Graves turned abruptly to the left, toward a tall redwood that shot skyward fifty yards further on.

A few of them observed Clark's face suddenly light up as though with relief and triumph; but they made nothing of it, and would have made nothing of the whole situation save Jeff's death, had not Clark presently said, in quite an ordinary tone:

"Wait, Graves! That's the wrong tree."

Graves, leading Jeff on toward the redwood, did not stop, did not speak, did not appear to hear; but suddenly Jeff's sleeve took to twitching under his hand. And they all saw that, too.

"That's the wrong tree, I tell you; that's the wrong tree."

This time Clark spoke loudly; the men nearest him turned upon him demanding what he meant; and a general hubbub of angry voices began. The crowd suspected a trick, and was in no mood for it. Only Graves seemed to pay no attention to the enigmatic words; he walked on even more swiftly, but stumblingly too, as though something had suddenly gone wrong with his legs.

Then Clark broke away from the front of the mob, advanced swiftly upon Graves, gripped him by the arm and whirled him around. And the perplexity of the men increased as they observed Graves' face, working with rage, with bewilderment, with fear, with a vain effort at self-control. They fell silent, dazed by the riddle; a terrible feeling of mistake swept over them. They heard Graves protesting, in a frightened, vicious, shrill voice:

"What's the matter with you? Let go me or I'll ——"

Graves' right hand released Jeff's arm and darted for his hip, but Clark was before him, and held the muzzle of Graves' own gun against his ribs.

"You infernal snake in the grass," rasped Clark, "I thought so. You white-livered, thrice-blasted imp of Satan! And you," to the gaping crowd, "you pin-headed dupes! Look at him. And look here."

He turned from Graves, strode to the oak, reached up between its low-hanging branches, and into the hollow trunk of it. His hand came away with a thick sheaf of currency in it. Again he reached into the hiding-place, and this time drew out a rifle, muzzle foremost.

The crowd gasped.

"The rifle that killed old man Marble," explained Clark harshly, "and the money that was taken from him. Who put them there? The man that knowed they was there. Who was that?"

He turned to where Graves had stood.

Graves had slipped past the crowd, and was making his way toward the road, where stood his horse. But they brought him back.

"And now," said Clark, "that you've got the right man, if you want to go ahead with your lynchin' bee, proceed."

"BUT they didn't," he said later. "Funny, wasn't it. But I reckon they'd shot their wad, all right, and you can't do that twice."

"How did I spot Graves? Pshaw, that was easy. If a game-warden don't learn to follow a trail and spot a liar, I'd like to know who does. Right away I found the gun and money—Graves wasn't takin' any chances on bein' caught with them—and of course I knowed from that, the other evidence had been planted on the nester. Who planted it? The man that wanted him hung. Who was that? Graves. Why? Because he'd turned the trick himself. And I figured on him bein' so anxious to prove the nester guilty by hangin' him that he'd clean forgot till he took the job that the oak was the nearest practicable tree, and that the sheriff would be sure to find *his* gun and the money when he came to cut the body down.

"Why did Graves want to incriminate the nester? If you want to rightly understand that, go visit Jeff Stewart some time. A mighty nifty place he has now, worth about ten times four hundred, if I'm a judge. Well, if Graves' plan had worked, who'd have filed on it, and owned it to-day? Graves, o' course. A clever cuss he was, only he forgot one thing. You know what the fool said in his heart. Well, I'm no theologian, but he sure was mistaken; there is Law anyway—some folks call it compensation—and that Law Graves couldn't buck.

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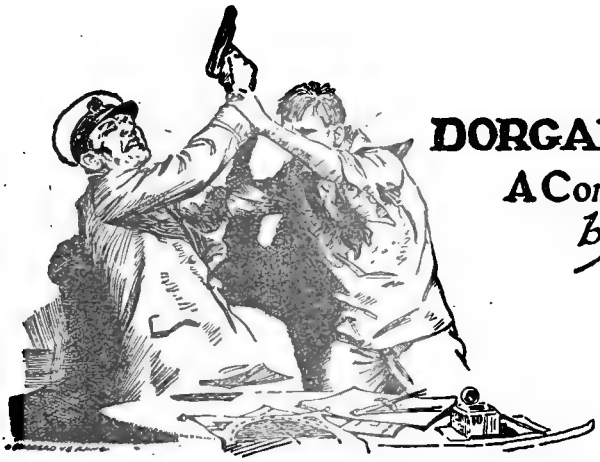

DORGAN'S DEVIL-DEVIL

A Complete Novelette by H A Lamb

Author of "The Island of Changing Shapes," "Tal Taulai Khan," etc.

NEVER heard of the Wu Fang Huan Steamship Co., have you, Matey? Mighty few people have; but just the same this Wu Fang Co. came near stirring things up lively on the Pacific a few months after the big war broke.

Don't know the Tafahi Islands either, do you? They're a little bunch of sandy atolls, like some one had sprinkled them careless-like around the ocean due south of the Samoas, and then forgot all about 'em. Every now and then some ill-found trading schooner slouches up from the Lakemba passage and takes on fruit and water from them. We used to pass the islands when the old *Wabash* was policing the Samoas. Old Jeff landed there from time to time. Old Jeff? Captain Jeffrey Bronson of the U. S. cruiser *Wabash*.

It was to see Dorgan that Old Jeff stopped off every six months or so, and we men did a bit of sea-lawyerin' as to why he wanted to. Of course we knew Dorgan had been quartermaster before he drifted out of the Service to the South Seas and shipped as mate under Phil Warren, one of the toughest of the recruiting gang. Kid White said that in '98 Dorgan saved old Jeff's life at Guantanamo—and we let it go at that.

Anyway we never thought much of the castaway until the collision with the Wu Fang Steamship Co., and we got a rise out of Dorgan's devil-devil. Sure, that's what it was—a devil-devil, just like George the Kanaka, said. Well, I was there at that island, right enough, when things began to happen! things that hadn't ought to happen—and I can log it out for you if you'll bear along a straight course without any furbishing or frills.

It began that day Old Jeff went ashore to see Dorgan, and I, being bo'sun, come up with him to the hut where Dorgan lived. Dorgan was a sizable man, he was, with wide shoulders and clean-cut arms, only much overweight. He was squatted down, surly as they make 'em, stirring up the embers of his fire, his dirty knees hunched up under the tangle he called a beard, and his narrow eyes half shut. He hadn't any shoes—only a blue flannel shirt and a pair of breeches left over from kingdom come. Something crossed his mind, and he must 'a' grinned because I saw his beard wrinkle, and he spat into the hot coals.

"Come over to the other side of my island some day," he said to Captain Bronson, "and I'll show you the prettiest harbor this side of Pago-Pago. There's room for a dozen dreadnaughts, big as you tell me they are, to lie snug in that bight."

I pricked up my ears at that, for if we'd passed the other side of the island once, we'd been by it a dozen times, and no signs of an inlet had I ever seen there, nor did I know of any.

"Do you keep this harbor of yours in your pocket, Dorgan?" I asked him, curious, as Old Jeff made no reply. "Or is it one of the kind you fold up and put away when not in use?"

He looked up at me, lazy-like, and his eyes were as cold as a fish.

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"I didn't ask you if you'd seen any bight, Mac," he came back at me. "I said I'd show it to you, so even that square head of yours could get an idea of it. The harbor's there, but the inlet's twisted so you can't see anything from the offing except the high cliffs with a bunch of plantains growing on each side of the channel. That twist makes the bight snug when the hurricanes are raising —— along the beach. Put up a wireless station there, Captain Bronson, build a couple of docks, make me your harbor pilot, and general caretaker, and the thing is done."

He broke off then because Old Jeff motioned for silence. Out on the cruiser some one on the bridge was wig-wagging us, and I began reading off the message.

CAPTAIN BRONSON:
Wireless from Honolulu orders *Wabash* to meet and stop steamer *Bangkok* of Red Belt Line, Hongkong, cleared for 'Frisco. Chalmers, U. S. Consul at Hongkong, informs that *Bangkok* has contraband Chinamen on board, and has deserted steamer lane. Last sighted off Philippines, headed E. by S. E. *Bangkok* is 1,800-ton cargo steamer with one funnel.

The message came from Lieutenant Cole of the *Wabash*, and it didn't make me yelp for joy because it wouldn't be a pleasant task combing the seas for a Chink-running vessel. To my surprise Dorgan was hep to the message. But then I'd forgotten he was in the Service once.

"That's an English vessel," he said to Old Jeff, "how the blazes are you going to stop her on the high seas, now that the Pacific's rotten with warships?"

Old Jeff looked at him thoughtfully.

"If I remember right," he said, "Captain Southerland is skipper of the *Bangkok* now, and he isn't built on smuggling lines. Probably our consul at Hongkong made a mistake on account of there being a number of coolies among the stokers. However, Southerland will have to clear himself of suspicion if we catch him."

"There's a bounty of six hundred dollars a man, sir," said I, "if coolies can be got into the States. And then the *Bangkok's* a thousand miles or so out of her course."

"That's what Southerland will have to explain," said Bronson, more to himself than to us. "Probably it's all fair and aboveboard when we get to the bottom of it."

Dorgan chuckled to himself and tried to puff his pipe into action without result, there being no tobacco left in it. Old Jeff took out his watch.

"We'll be getting back to the ship, Dorgan," he said. "Will you change your mind and come along? We need a quartermaster."

I was headed for the beach by that time, to get the boat crew together, but I looked over my shoulder and saw Dorgan shake his head. Then Old Jeff passed him a package done up in paper.

"Something for you, Dorgan," he explained hasty-like. "It may be some time before we look in again—hurricane season's overdue now."

Dorgan opened the paper. From it he took an old brier pipe and some tobacco. In the fire, he found a coal to light up with.

NOW the *Wabash* was well-found and wholesome in a storm, having a broad beam. There wasn't anything the matter with her design, and she was as good a craft of her class as you'd find afloat. I want you to get that much clear in your mind, Matey. But there was one thing we had to admit wasn't all it should be, and that was her power plant. She wasn't built yesterday, and her engines had seen a deal of service. Result was that we couldn't hike along more'n nine knots or so, and it irked her to do that much. There was times when we wished she had more punch to her screw—times when the seas began to climb over her rail, and we had to clear out from among the islands when the hurricanes come to pay us a visit. I'm telling you this now because it had a bearing on what happened later.

For a couple of days after leaving Dorgan we'd headed north until the palms of Tutuila showed on the skyline, after which we turned back again.

All hands were keeping a lookout for smoke to the west'ard, for it was about time for the *Bangkok* to be along, and it was pretty certain that she'd pass somewhere near us if she went to the south of Samoa, as was her course, last we'd heard.

It was in the evening of the third day, I think, that we caught sight of the smoke we were looking for, outlined against the red and gold of the sunset. I was just piping the men to mess at the time, and hadn't more'n a hurried squint at her before going below. Kid White, who managed to know everything that happened on the

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ship and a lot that was going to but didn't, told me that it was the vessel we was after, and that she had a hold stuffed full of Chinamen. By the time we was absorbin' the last of our coffee and pie the men were telling each other that there was a British cruiser standing by and that there'd be a row when we tried to search the *Bangkok*. A warship's a hotbed of gossip, Matey, and the sea-lawyerin' the men do would make an old ladies' home look like a efficiency factory.

I didn't believe the yarn about the cruiser, but I tumbled up on deck as soon as I could to see what was in the weather quarter. There wasn't anything to be seen by then, because the sun had popped out of sight, and the sea was a murk. I cast an eye up to the bridge, and there were Bronson and Cole with glasses looking anxious-like into the twilight. By the looks of things we'd lost track of the vessel and were hunting for her on blind reckoning.

The old *Wabash* was humping herself along, doing all of her nine knots, and grunting over it like she was having trouble in her guts. A lot of good it did us, for when the moon come out, a couple of hours later, the ship had vanished like one of those Arabian tents they talk about in the poems —yes, the kind that silently pass away. All the same the moon did us a good turn, because as it come out the look-out yelled that there was a reef ahead, and we had to bear off to pass around one of the islands. As we did so I cast an eye over that island, and it looked like I'd seen it before, only in the moonlight it was hard to tell.

So all we got for our chase was a "beautiful vista of the tropic sea," as the steamship companies' circulars say, with the moonlight shimmering off into a kind of haze, but we'd seen it so much we didn't stay on deck to edify ourselves any.

It was the logical result of sending a nine-knot cruiser to catch a fifteen-knot steamer somewhere in the Pacific when the steamer didn't want to be caught. How did we know she didn't want to be caught? It was like Kid White said.

"Mac," he confided to me as we were stowing our jumpers into the hammock clews before turning in for the night, "there's a mystery in what's happening around here. We've seen some queer things since the war broke out, but this beats them all. Here's a respectable steamer of a decent line with a God-fearing skipper, and what does she do but sneak around to the south of Samoa, and douse her lights when she sees an American warship coming."

"There's a bigger mystery than that, youngster," I told him. "And that is, why does any skipper in the Pacific want to risk the Chink-running game when freight rates are going up out of sight, and a vessel earns her own worth in a single voyage. He could make more with a cargo of steel billets or grain to Russia than if his hold was lousey with Chinamen."

"Um. That may be true, Mac. But you can't carry munitions when you're bound east. Besides, there's the matter of being out of his course. You can't tell me the *Bangkok* came down here for the health of her crew when she was bound for 'Frisco. It looks to me as if Southerland had a good reason for coming to the Samoas. I'll bet there are warships around."

"Warships your grandma, Kid!" I told him. "That was no warship we sighted."

"I don't know about that, Mac. You see I was up the mast at the time, and I could see the sun glittering on some long bit of metal on her bow. It looked mighty like a gun. I was hoping there'd be a scrap when I saw that."

I understood now where the warship story had come from. The boy had imagined he saw something like a gun, and in twenty minutes all the men are telling each other we'd seen a battleship.

"That's not all, Mac," went on Kid White as hopeful as a young puppy. "Coming down to the mess deck I passed the wireless cabin, and they were trying to get in touch with the *Bangkok* without result. I heard Captain Bronson tell Cole that the *Bangkok* carried a wireless. If they carried a wireless, why didn't they answer us? Because they didn't want to."

"You haven't missed many tricks this hand, youngster," I admitted. "Tell all that to the marines, and pass them the word to sharpen their bayonets for a boarding party, because we may engage a mysterious warship at any moment, let alone tackling a few thousand Chinamen."

Kid White knew how much I like the marines who clutter up the decks and pass comments on the men who have to do a turn of duty before them, and he grinned at me like the friendly little cuss he is.

"Here's hoping the *Bangkok* runs into

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us coming back," he laughed, and grabbed his clews, landing in the hammock with a heave and a swing.

I did likewise, ready for all the sleep I could get. In spite of the boy's tidings about the ship we were after, I didn't suspect that there was anything wrong with the *Bangkok*. We missed her in the dark, that was all, and we'd be a long time before seeing her again. It was a good thing I slept well that night, because I was to have little sleep for a long bit after.

III

IF CAPTAIN BRONSON hadn't had a hunch about the disappearance of the steamer we were chasing, we might not have gone back to Dorgan's island. And if we hadn't gone back to the island the Wu Fang Huan Steamship Co., Limited, Hongkong and Valparaiso, would have done a big business. And it wasn't a real hunch at that, only a half-hunch that wouldn't let Old Jeff take the *Wabash* away from the vicinity until he knew for certain that the ship we were after had cleared out.

We men pulled willingly at the oars when Old Jeff was in the gig, and there wasn't one of us from Kid White up who didn't have a spot in his heart for the white-haired man that was skipper of our ship. If the test had come the crew of the *Wabash* would have followed Old Jeff into action anywhere like those other boys did at Guantanamo when he was a lieutenant and not a captain. I suppose it was because he was warm-hearted under his uniform, which isn't true of a great many men. Take Cole, for example. He was a good-enough officer, but once or twice when things were stirring around lively in a storm he'd shown us that he didn't know what to do, and when an officer can't make up his mind what order to give it's bad for the men. Old Jeff always knew what to do.

It was his hunch that brought us back to Dorgan's island, and up to the hut where the castaway lived. I came along, of course, and Dorgan greeted us about as cordially as usual.

Captain Bronson told him about our chase of the night before and how the vessel had given us the slip. I didn't see why he wanted Dorgan to know about it at first, but presently I got his drift.

"That vessel," concluded Old Jeff thoughtful-like, "must have passed pretty close to this island. Did you see anything go by? It was moonlight."

Dorgan grinned, as if he was pleased.

"Yep," he retorted, "I saw a ship go by."

"Well?"

"It was the *Wabash*, and she looked as if she was in a hurry."

"Nothing else?"

"Can't say I did. It was hot in the hut, and I went down to the beach for awhile. I had a good view of you."

Old Jeff chewed at his stubby mustache thoughtfully.

"You were telling me about a harbor on the other side—the north side—of the island. I would like to look at it this morning."

Dorgan squinted at him and then at me.

"You want to see the harbor?" he muttered. "It's a five-mile hike overland."

"Well, it's a fine morning for a walk, Dorgan," smiled Old Jeff. "I'm ready when you are."

The prospect didn't seem to please Dorgan any, but he hadn't any objection handy after he'd offered to take us there himself. He got up and stretched himself. Then he shook himself like a dog and started off in the direction of the brush, followed by Old Jeff, with me bringing up abaft the line ahead procession. We didn't do any talking, being busy with our own thoughts. For that matter, I wasn't inclined to say anything after the first half-mile, for my legs weren't designed for long cruises on land, and the ground hadn't the feel of a deck.

The trail led through the bush all the way. It wasn't even a trail, because Dorgan seemed to find his way by landmarks and steer his course by the best going. The undergrowth rose up around our knees and clutched at us with thorns and vine creepers like it wanted to pull us down.

Once we passed a mangrove swamp and the tree roots began to climb up into the air instead of staying below the ground, where they belonged. A tree snake reached out from one of the roots and poked his nose into my shoulder. After that I kept clear of the foliage, and tried to forget that the place smelled like rank weeds and stagnant water—which probably it was. I was glad to get out to the higher land, where the plantains were thicker and the ground firmer. Some people think that

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these islands are blessed with beautiful foliage, but it takes more than scenery to interest me, and when the landscape is as treacherous as that mangrove swamp, give me the shortest way out every time.

We stepped right out of the bush to a slope overlooking the shore of the concealed harbor. Dorgan hadn't lied about it either, for the place was big enough for several ships, besides being fringed with a beach of white sand and green plantains—a quiet, pretty scene, with the coral showing up through the blue water and the sun touching everything up until the colors were enough to make your head swim. We didn't waste time looking around, however, for plumb in the middle of the bight lay a ship. That was how Old Jeff's hunch came out, assaying fifty-fifty pure gold. That is, he was half right. There was a craft in the harbor, but she was a stranger to us.

She was a small steamer, painted gray, with two funnels. She had a hook into the coral bottom of the bight to guard against drifting asbore, and smoke was lazily curling up from a funnel. Along her decks we could see the crew hustling, and they seemed to have their hands full. At that distance—we were nearly a mile away—I couldn't see the men clearly, but I saw enough to make me curious. First off, the hands were running along the decks with a funny kind of a step, half a trot. Most of them were working at something on the foredeck and when I saw what it was I gave a whistle of surprise. It was a good-sized gun, mounted in place—maybe a five-incher. A couple of officers were superintending things.

Matey, there are times when even a square-head like me gets a good, strong hunch that things aren't shaping up the way they should. I had a hunch like that now, and I knew that ship wasn't any innocent cargo steamer. What was it doing with the gun mounted on deck? And why was it tucked in this God-forsaken kind of a harbor while the crew milled around on deck like a lot of frightened cattle? It was too much for me. There was the ship, and there we were and I let it go at that.

Not Old Jeff, though. He cut through the bush down to the beach where a cutter was drawn up on the sand, the oars lying sloppily on the seats. Dorgan and I followed him, and I noticed that Dorgan was kind of thoughtful as if he was thinking up important reasons for staying back home. That didn't worry me at the time. For half a moment I was sorry that I'd left my rifle in the cutter when we landed that morning. Old Jeff also was without the automatic he sometimes carried on shore. Dorgan, of course, didn't have any arms to bring along, so the three of us were as harmless as so many puppies.

And we acted up to the part, right enough. Without taking any soundings as to where we were going, or keeping a weather eye out for danger, we jumped out of the bush to the sand of the beach and right into the midst of the party that had come ashore in the cutter. Blind puppies couldn't have showed less intelligence.

The shore party from the cutter was naturally expecting us, seeing as how we'd advertised our coming by breaking through the bush, and they was all set to receive us. I think they didn't think they'd see an officer of the United States Navy, however, and I certainly didn't look for half a dozen Chinamen dressed in seamen's clothes, two of them carrying rifles.

In a flash back I recollected the funny way the men on the ship had been running about, and I saw the reason for it. They were Chinamen. Now a Chink doesn't run like a white man; he has a quick little way of trotting along, almost a slide, and this was what had caught my eye a few minutes ago on the ship.

Old Jeff was the first to take in the situation. If he was as dubious about our reception as I was, he didn't show it. He pointed to the gray ship in the middle of the blue lagoon.

"You come from that ship?" he asked.

"Yes," one of the Chinks answered in fair English, "all the same our ship. Where your ship?"

Old Jeff hesitated for half an instant, not wishing to let them know that our craft was on the other side of the island, as that was five miles too far away. Those Chinks were not falling in love with us, it was easy to see. The two with the rifles were handling them in a businesslike way that showed they knew the useful end from the bolt. The rifles were Lee-Enfields, apparently new. Dorgan seemed to have lost interest in what was going on; he squatted down in his favorite position and poked his hands into the sand.

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"We are Americans," explained old Jeff calmly, "and there is a cruiser off the coast. What ship is that out there?"

"You will see, plenty soon," grinned the Chink who acted as spokesman for the crowd. "You come with us, quick."

He snapped a quick glance back at the others and they began to edge up around us. The two with the rifles brought their pieces to the ready. I cursed myself for leaving mine back on the other beach. It began to look like a scrap. I didn't reckon things would bust up the way they did, though. It was Dorgan that started it.

He had been on his knees in the sand. Now he flung up both hands, twice, and a cloud of sand dashed into the faces of the Chinks. Instantly he was on his feet.

"Run for it," he snapped, "into the bush!"

He started to run for the bush, about fifty feet away, and I followed him with a glance over my shoulder to see that Captain Bronson was coming. He did not get away as easily as we did. Either the Chinks near him had not got the sand in their faces or he slipped in the heavy footing, for I saw him pitch forward and roll over, with a couple of the yellow men on top of him. I stopped dead in my tracks.

Whang! went one of the Lee-Enfields. A Chinaman was down on one knee taking careful aim at me for a second shot. The first had passed a few inches from my chin, and it was asking too much to stay for another. It was useless to try to go back to help Old Jeff. I ducked down and scrambled through the bush while half a dozen shots went whining overhead.

I hadn't gone a hundred yards before I ran into Dorgan, and the two of us put a good distance between us and the beach. Coming to an opening under a large plantain, we sat down on the ground and stared at each other blankly.

"We can't leave Old Jeff, Dorgan," I told him as soon as I could breathe right. "We've got to go back after him."

"And get some heathen lead in your guts? I can't see it that way. If it hadn't been for Bronson's wandering out on the beach like that we'd not be in this fix."

"We can't leave him there."

Dorgan lifted one lip in a snarl, in a way of his, and squatted down, picking up some stones, with which he marked on the dirt.

"Those Chinamen were dead anxious to use their rifles on us," I meditated, "and that ain't like the breed. They had some reason for keeping us from getting away."

Dorgan's slit eyes flitted my way, then back again.

"Has that much got through your square head, Mac?" he sneered. "Of course they didn't want to let us get away. I knew we'd walked into a nice mess when I first saw them."

Well, it didn't help matters any to talk like that. Old Jeff was in the hands of a bunch of Chinamen who might be anything from a pack of drunken coolies to a gang of pirates. The thing for me to do was to get back to the beach where we came from and report what had happened to Lieutenant Cole on the ship. The sooner I was on my way the better.

"Come, Dorgan," I told him, sharp-like, "shake a leg, man, and take me back along the trail to the beach. We haven't any time to lose."

He said nothing, just moved his stones around in the dirt like he was playing chess himself, and me itching to be starting back.

"Look alive, man," I barked, "we've got our wind back and there's a five-mile hike before us. Where does the trail lie?"

"There's no trail, Mac," he said after a while, "I follow a line of my own bearings, which you couldn't make out. You can't get back there alone, and I'm not going to time you."

I guess my jaw dropped open at that, and it took me a minute to get the idea of what he said. Not go back to the ship! We had to do that to get Old Jeff out of the fix he was in. It hadn't occurred to me before that Dorgan wouldn't help Old Jeff, who'd been white to him, white as any man could be. I slapped one hand down on his shoulder.

"Look here, Dorgan," I said, "Captain Bronson's been square with you, and he's done you many a good turn which there was no call for—"you see, I forgot for the moment that story about Guantanamo—"and if you won't bear a hand to help him now, a yellow-livered, mangy, misbegotten chicken 'd be too proud to claim you for an acquaintance."

I went on for a while, telling him some more of the same, and I noticed he'd stopped monkeying with the stones.

"If you won't go back yourself, tell me

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the bearings and I'll shape a course for the ship alone," I ended up with.

He looked at me with a love-light of sheer hate in his eyes, and his tangled beard wrinkled up.

"Mac," he replied slowly, "you're laying up a heap of trouble for yourself. Your pig-headed intellect isn't built to handle anything that isn't plain as your five fingers. Take my advice and keep clear of what's going on here. If you butt in you'll get hurt—bad. As for getting back to the beach, there are two reasons why it won't do. First, you'd get lost in the swamp, and spend the night there; second, when you got to the beach the ship'd be gone."

It was a long speech for Dorgan to make, and I got his drift without any dictionary. I got a flash of something else. My companion knew more about those Chinamen, and the gray ship, than he was telling.

Before I could answer he was on his feet and striding off into the bush.

"'Vast there," I called after him. "Where are you going?"

"To the native village," he flung back over his shoulder.

I recollected then that there was a bunch of Malaitans located somewhere on the island, not Samoans, but Malaita men who'd returned from Queensland and settled down where they could carry on friendly warfare with the niggers on nearby islands, swapping heads and trading tobacco sticks. For some reason they'd let Dorgan alone. Well, what he said about my getting to the south beach was true enough—I couldn't make it alone I could go back to the harbor and probably get potted by some Chinaman from the ship, or I could follow Dorgan. Which I did.

WE didn't have so far to go. The brush cleared away after a bit and we stepped out into the palm grove where the native village was.

Ever seen one of them, Matey? Well, they ain't the dirty muck heaps some people seem to think they are. First off you see several dozen huts scattered through the grove, raised high enough from the ground on bamboo piles for a tall man to walk underneath. The palm trees have sheets of tin stuck into them so when it rains the rainwater runs off the tin into a cask on the ground One hut, bigger than the others, was decorated after a fashion with pearl shell. This Dorgan told me was the palaver house where the villagers piped all hands to council when they planned a sally to the next village for a few heads, or a banquet of roast pig.

The odor of the place wasn't all it should be, and the dried heads stuck on posts in front of the huts wasn't a "visitors welcome" sign. Or maybe it was. Dorgan seemed to enjoy watching me while I took in the scenery, and he slipped me the information that the Malaitans left him strictly alone, but their daddies had been head-hunters when white men's heads were considered the height of fashion, and they might want to make me an addition to the skulls. He said the market price for a head was high at that time, being ten yards of calico, thirty sticks of tobacco, and a knife or two.

With that he ducked into one of the huts, leaving me to face the crowd that came swarming around to inspect the visitors. The boys weren't bad specimens, being tall and sizable, dressed in lava-lavas and with bits of bone, shell and pipes stuck through the lobes of their ears. The women wore a similar costume, and they was all curious as blazes to look at me. For the second time that day I cursed Tim MacGonigle for the fool he was in leaving his rifle behind when he went exploring in the wilds of a South Sea island.

There was no use worrying about it, however, and I grinned back at the boys who came up to inspect me with their long spears hanging on their arms It was one of these that gave me an idea. He was a Malaitan like the rest of them, but he seemed to take an especial interest in me, haranguing the others like he was auctioning me off to the highest bidder. Presently he spied my bo'sun's whistle hanging from its chain, and pointed to it.

"What name along that, big fella," he grinned at me. "Him plenty big *tabu*, my word, belong you."

It was the *bêche-de-mer* lingo that most of these fellows understand, but I was a poor hand at it. All the same he gave me a hint how to interest the gathering, and take their minds off the high cost of a meat diet.

"Plenty big *tabu*, George," I told him "Listen."

I picked up the whistle and blew the call for a boat's crew. You've never heard a bo'sun pipe, Matey? Well, it ain't quite

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so loud as a locomotive whistle, but it's shriller, and it runs up and down the scale like a Tom cat that's sighin' for his light o' love. George gave ground for a second; then he and the others came crowding around again, pleased as kids at a Christmas tree when Santa Claus comes.

I resumed the concert, piping "down hammocks," the mess call, and every other call I knew with some of my own thrown in for good measure The concert was a grand success, as they say in the papers, and the audience was spellbound throughout the entire program. In a few minutes they was all over their nervousness, which means danger among that breed, and was having a grand time when Dorgan made his appearance from the hut, carrying something in his hand. He grinned when he took in the open-air gathering.

"It's my turn to perform now, Mac," he said, and showed me what he was carrying. It was a mirror, one of the regular trade stock that the natives buy from the schooners.

He began flashing it around on the huts and plantains. The sun was bright, it being early in the afternoon, and a heavy bank of clouds hung down low to the north. Dorgan flashed his mirror on the clouds several times.

"What's the idea?" I asked him after he'd done this for a moment or two.

"You'll see," he replied and went on with his flashes, sweeping the reflection on to the clouds, then off again. It wasn't long before I caught the meaning of it all. When an answering flash showed against the clouds I knew what it was. I had seen the signal boys practising it from the cruiser before this with their helios. Dorgan was flashing the signal code to them, and they were answering. I spelled out the message that he sent, with one or two mistakes, due to his being rusty with the code.

The message was to Lieutenant Cole on the cruiser and it ordered him to bring the *Wabash* around to a point off the north coast where there were two high cliffs with three palm trees showing on one. This point was opposite a break in the barrier reef. Dorgan signed the message with Captain Bronson's name.

When he had finished I thought it over. Cole had answered and signified that he'd bring the vessel to the point ordered. This was probably off the break in the reef that led to the inlet. So far it was a good idea. The *Wabash* was worth a sight more to us off the north coast outside the harbor than where she was now.

But why hadn't Dorgan mentioned the scrap with the Chinamen? That ought to have been the first thing in his message. A glance up at the cloud bank showed me that it was too late to add to the message, because the sun was drifting behind the murk and the mirror was useless.

What was my companion's idea in sending the message? Was he thinking better of his refusal to help Old Jeff? Or had he another purpose, one that he concealed from me? I decided to watch matters closely, and especially Dorgan. Whatever happened, I had a hunch that he'd be in it.

Meanwhile the villagers prepared a feast for us. It was quite a feast, too. Yams, plantains, roast pig, fish of various kinds and the usual khava. I ate without much appetite, thinking of the skulls in front of the huts, but Dorgan downed his grub with relish. While I was eating, George, the big Kanaka who had a scar running from ear to cheek-bone, came and sat down beside me and begged for another performance on the pipe.

"You big fella make'm music along whistle, plenty loud," he said.

"Anything to oblige the company," I agreed, and gave a few trills, which seemed to please him. I didn't know it then, but that pipe of mine was rendering me good service. You see the Malaitans had come to the conclusion that it was a big *tabu* of mine which it wasn't good policy to meddle with. George expressed his thanks and tried to make me drink some of the khava. I knew how the wine was made, and I wasn't anxious to try it. This disappointed George, who had no such ideas.

"You drink'm khava, big fella," he told me, "you feel double time, seven bells, plenty good."

I needed a clear head for what was coming, however, and I explained to George after a fashion that my *tabu* wouldn't let me touch it. This he understood readily enough, because a *tabu* is law among the blacks, only he felt sorry for me at having to ride the wagon on account of my *tabu*.

George, with half a dozen others was selected by Dorgan to come with us when we made our trip to the north shore to get in touch with the cruiser. The black boys

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brought their spears along, and led the way from the village up a narrow path I hadn't seen before which took us circling around the harbor without getting a glimpse of the Chinamen or the ship we'd seen.

Dorgan wasn't talkative on the way, and I kept my thoughts to myself. He was going the way I wanted to go, which was to the *Wabash*, and I was content with that. But don't think I trusted Dorgan any more than I trusted George. He was a white man, but Old Jeff had been wasting his time when he tried to get Dorgan back with us. When a man breaks loose from the Service and takes to the beach he doesn't come back, not once in a thousand years. And Dorgan's record with the blackbirder Warren wasn't to his credit. Blackbirding ran hand in hand with pearl stealing with that breed and worse—until the two quarreled and Warren tried to comb the Navy man's whiskers with his knife. After that Dorgan swore he'd square accounts with Warren when they met. So you see I'd pretty good grounds for not trusting him.

Well, the heat wasn't any soothing ointment to reflection. It got worse, even with the sun out of sight in the murk. There wasn't any air stirring, and the signs read storm to me. By the time we reached the north shore I was wet down with sweat.

It had looked bad in the bush, but when we come out on the rise overlooking the beach it was worse. The murk was thick enough to cut with a knife; the clouds was banked around us like a tent. A slow, oily swell was breaking over the barrier reef and pounding on the beach at our feet.

About a mile out, hove to, was the *Wabash*.

IV

"CAN you swim?" Dorgan asked. I cast an eye over the swell and surf and shook my head.

"Not out to the ship, if that's what you mean," I answered. "And it looks to me like a bad bet for any boat to try to work in to shore, even if they could see us here, which they can't on account of the murk."

"Right you are, Bo'sun," said he, with a flash of yellow teeth through the tangle of his beard. "Your mates on the ship can't see us on shore. If we're going to get out there we'll have to swim for it."

I pointed out to the weather quarter, only there wasn't any weather. It was a dead calm.

"Look here, Dorgan," I snapped, "you know as well as I do that this spot is all set for a hurricane, and when it comes the Lord help any man swimming offshore. Also remember that the *Wabash* is going to beat out to sea when the wind comes. If you try to make the distance by swimming, it's an even bet that they never see you on the ship."

It was growing darker all the time, although it couldn't have been late in the afternoon. It looked to me like the swell was getting bigger. I could hear the Kanakas muttering to each other and they didn't seem happy.

Dorgan sniffed the air like a dog.

"There's a wind due, right enough, but I'm going out there before it comes You can stay on shore if you want."

Up to then I hadn't expected he'd make the try to the ship. It was too much of a risk. Now I saw he'd do it, and it was up to me to show my hand.

"Dorgan," said I, facing him squarely, "you don't go off to that ship without me. I know you for what you are and I don't trust you any more'n a hound. It was you that took us to the harbor this morning, where we run into those Chinamen. You got away without being shot at, but Old Jeff didn't. Maybe you knew that ship in the harbor, and maybe you've been aboard her—I don't know. But that ship's no peaceful merchantman, and those Chinamen mean no good."

"The ship," said Dorgan, "belongs to the Wu Fang Huan Company You've never heard of that, have you Mac?"

"No," I told him, "but I've clapped eyes on them, and that's enough. I know their breed, and I know yours. There's many a schooner you've looted, and they say that there's blacks from Queensland that you and Warren put over the side to save the trouble of taking them back to their islands."

"That's a lie," said Dorgan, with a queer light in his eyes. "You can't tell what a man will do because you know what he's done in the past."

"I don't know," I came back. "All the same, I've heard plenty about you, and you don't go off to the *Wabash* without me."

Dorgan's glance swept up to mine, and there was the old, surly glint in it.

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"Do you think I'm playing the game with those Chinamen?"

"That I do," I said. "I've thought so since this morning."

"Well, it's taken you a long time to say it, then." He stepped back a pace. "What's your play now?"

"My play, Dorgan," I said, "is to keep you with me. And, by ——, I will."

"And how do you figure on doing it?" he sneered.

"Watch me," said I.

I jerked out my bo'sun's pipe, and sent a call over the water to the cruiser. Some of the boys on the rail heard it, because I saw them move to the side of the ship. Dorgan's face darkened and he whispered something to George, who shook his head. I was following this out of the corner of my eye, and I guessed that Dorgan wanted the natives to rush me. They wouldn't do it. It was the whistle, you see. According to their ideas that whistle was a powerful devil-devil and no good would come to them from meddling.

Seeing this, Dorgan let out a string of cusswords and jumped for me. I was watching for this and as he closed I marked him heavily over the eye. He gave back a bit, then came in again.

He was a big man, Dorgan was, and had twenty pounds over me. I kept away from him all I could and once I marked him over the heart—a hard hit, for he paled. I jumped for him then, with my head down. I could handle my fists pretty clever, but Dorgan was too heavy for me. Mind, I'm not making a squall over the matter He got to me cleverly enough as I rushed him —a feint with the left and a crushing uppercut that caught my chin. It laid me out clean, for I found myself lying in the sand and wondering which way I'd have to move to get up again.

When I could sit up and see straight after that knock-out punch on the jaw, Dorgan was down the cliff to the surf. He waved his hand back at me before diving into the surf and I watched him work out beyond the line of white and head for the break in the barrier reef. I cursed him black, and myself, too, for getting laid out like a ripe pumpkin, but it didn't do any good. There was Dorgan off to the ship, free to work mischief, with me on the shore, helpless as a scuppered whale-boat.

George, the Kanaka, came up and grinned.

"My word," he said, "no use try to knock seven bells out'v Marster Dorgan. Big devil-devil belong him. Little devil-devil belong you, big fella" and he indicated my whistle—"no good fight Marster Dorgan, my word."

"What is this devil-devil thing, anyway?" I asked him, watching Dorgan's arm cleaving the swell in a regular beat as he worked out to the ship

It was a big contract for George to explain this, but he made a try at it, aided by gestures as he went along.

"Long time this devil-devil belong Marster Dorgan, big fella," he began. "George steal'm tobacco Marster Dorgan; him come village, catch George, knock seven bells out'v him. George lay in bush long time, big fella, shoot'm fella Dorgan, cartridges gun all bad along devil-devil. My word, you one —— fool, big fella, meddle along Marster Dorgan."

So that was the secret of why the natives let Dorgan alone. Somehow, without arms he managed to make them think he had this devil-devil thing and frightened them off. Well, devil-devil or not, I hoped he'd never make the distance to the ship, treacherous scum that he was. It was due to me, however, that he did make it.

Half-way out to the cruiser they sighted him, owing to the attention my call had attracted. A boat was lowered away with another man in my place in the stern, and I watched them pick him up with bitter things in my heart. George took this for granted as another sign of Dorgan's devil-devil aiding him.

"You stop along beach too long, big fella," he warned me, turning back with the others into the bush. "Wind coming, my word. Rain coming, too."

I was glad to see them go off. With Dorgan gone I wasn't any too safe with them. One of the Malaitans might decide to risk the danger of my whistle *tabu* and take my head back with him as an ornament for his doorpost. Altogether, things looked about as cheery as a wake without the whisky. Here was Old Jeff in the hands of the Chinamen. And here I was holding my aching head on the beach and trying to think up new names to call Dorgan.

It might have been a few minutes I sat there—maybe an hour. But after a while I didn't do any more thinking. Something happened. The hurricane happened.

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If you've never been through a hurricane in those regions, Matey, you haven't an idea what they're like. I had been through quite a few, though, and when the first puff of wind struck my face and the palm trees began to bend into circles, I got on my feet and ran. The wind knocked me down, and I crawled along to get out from under the trees, and out of the direct force of the wind, against which there was no standing.

Back of the cliff a few hundred yards was a cleared space with an outcropping of rock. Into this I crawled and flattened out between two or three of the bigger rocks while the wind whipped down my back and the tops of the palm trees smashed up against my shelter as they passed by on their way inland.

The surf was mounting as the wind hurled the waves on the shore. A ways off on my right was the steady roar of the inlet where the sea dashed into it. The light was a murk, and occasional dashes of rain hid everything from view.

There was nothing to do but hang on and listen to the wind that sounded overhead like the whine of a thousand big shells tearing through the air. My head was still aching from Dorgan's uppercut, and altogether, I wasn't happy. For one thing, I knew the cruiser could never keep her station off the inlet, now that the hurricane had come up. Cole would hardly hang on to a lee shore with a wind like that pressing behind him. The engines of the cruiser were not hefty enough to keep her head to the seas that were beginning to roll past her. If he had wanted to, Cole couldn't stay where he was.

It took little guessing to tell that Dorgan was making the most of his time on the ship. Probably at this minute, while I was hanging to the rocks to keep from joining the general smash-up caused by the wind, he was sitting in the chart-room and explaining to Cole that Old Jeff was safe in his—Dorgan's—hut with me and that the ship could return for him when the storm had blown over. But the storm showed no signs of letting up. Rain followed wind, and then the two came together with undiminished force. The cruiser would be driven far from the island group, I reflected, and there wasn't much chance of seeing her before twenty-four hours or so.

Meanwhile the Wu Fang Huan ship could work out of the inlet, after the surf had died down a bit, and go about her business. And Old Jeff—what was happening to him?

My own plight was bad enough, but when I thought of Old Jeff in the grip of those Chinamen I made up my mind to get down to the harbor as soon as the wind would let me, swim out to the ship and try to find out where he was. It wasn't much of a chance, me being in poor shape for a one-man attack on an armed ship; still I made up my mind to get to Captain Bronson as soon as the Lord would permit me.

V

WELL, Matey, it isn't always easy to follow out your course, after you have it all picked, and the bearings right. By the time the wind had quit doing business on the island and the rain had chased itself elsewhere, it was dark, and I was stiff and sore from lying among the rocks. From that spot there was no view of the harbor, and I had to steer by dead reckoning as it were. I knew the harbor lay a mile or so back. So I wrung some of the water out of my shirt and breeches and started off through the bush.

There was no sign of a path, of course, and the storm had made the bush about as easy to walk through as a barbed-wire entanglement. Trees were strewn around promiscuous-like, and the vines were wrapped around everything. I had to feel my way, pulling aside the creepers that wanted to embrace me, and stumbling over the fallen plantains. It must 've been a weird course I steered that night. The deeper I got into the bush the less sure I was of where I wanted to go. Every now and then I sat down and wondered if I wasn't going around in a circle, like I'd heard men did when they was lost. Books tell of how you can find your way by feeling the weather side of the trees and the direction of the wind, but my trees was all of a heap and as for the wind, there wasn't any just when it might of done some good.

By and by I saw that the thicket ahead was getting sort of pale and light, and after a while it turned silver, with the shadows mottled across the way. The moon had come out. It helped me to dodge the worst holes and keep clear of the trees, for which I was thankful. Also, it showed me something that froze up the bit of blood that was still warm in me.

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It was during one of my spells of resting that I saw the man come slipping through the bush. He was like a moving shadow, with the moon glittering on something he held in his hand. I soon made out that he he was one of the Malaitans carrying a spear. He seemed to be looking for something, because every little while he'd stop and listen as if there was something going on and he wanted to find out what it was. It was clear that I must stay where I was and try to look like a shadow.

Presently the Kanaka slipped into some tangle of vines, and at the same time I heard something breaking the brush behind me. The moonlight where it got through the palms showed me a man running past me, stumbling along and panting like he was about done up. The light was too poor for me to tell who it was, but I saw he was heading in the direction of the Kanaka in the vines. Other shapes were coming after the first, making less noise and keeping more in the shadows. Some poor devil was being stalked by Dorgan's friends, the Malaitans, and it looked like nothing could give him a longer lease of life.

It wouldn't have done any good for me to stand up and yell for him to keep away from the tangle of vines he was headed for. I'd have got a spear stuck in me for my pains, and he'd be trapped either way. I felt another chill as I thought of Old Jeff. If he was that man . . . .

I'd stood up to shout when the poor devil dashed into the vines where the Kanaka was. I saw the dark figure of the native spring up, and the flash of moonlight on the spear. Then the flash disappeared, and there was a sound like a cough.

Presently the Kanaka came out of the vines alone, joined his friends who had come up, and the lot of them crowded around something that was hidden in the thicket.

It was about time for me to be moving on, which I did, lying down and crawling through the bush for a ways. When I saw I'd got clear of the Kanakas I stood up and made double time in the direction of the harbor. I thought to myself—

"Third reel, Tim McGonigle, the dauntless tar, escapes from the hands of the savages and, unaided, captures a Chinese warship by strategy and undying pluck."

I might have some strategy and nerve left in me, but not much else by that time. After what I'd seen in the bush, however, I was dead anxious to make the attempt on the ship, figuring that between getting shot and spitted on a spear, I preferred the former, and, any way, I might not get shot.

You know how it is when you come out of the woods at night. You don't know you're out until you miss running into trees. That was the way with me. The moon had gone behind a few clouds when I found myself standing on the beach. Dead in front of me was a ship at anchor.

That wasn't all, either. I'd come out of the bush about a dozen yards from a boat drawn up on the sand with a coolie standing guard all by his lonesome. He seen me at the same time I saw him, and gave a grunt of surprise. By the way he moved his arms I guessed he was handling a rifle, and I decided to lose no time in making an attack. Once before in this day the Chinks had slipped one over on me, but this was the return bout, and I wasn't going to take the count this time.

I got to him before he could open with his artillery and felt lovingly for his jaw in the dark. When I'd located it I swung hard and the coolie went back against the side of the gig on which we was struggling. After that he was "among those present," as they say in the society papers, and I dumped him on the beach, slipping his gun into the gig, following it myself with a shove that sent it skimming away from the shore.

So far my attack was a grand success. I had a ship all to myself, a gun, and I'd got back my self-respect, which was injured by two lickings in one day. I got out an oar and worked slowly toward the ship.

Before I'd quite got there I stopped and listened. There were a couple of boats alongside the ship, with men in them, and I saw that I'd have to take care of them somehow if I was going to skin up the side of the Wu Fang Huan ship without being the center of observation. So I drifted up to the boats softly, turning the matter over in my mind, wondering how to do it.

The first thing I knew there was a jolt and my craft stopped all at once. I'd drifted plumb into the boats and I heard a man wriggle around like he wanted to know what was coming his way. In a second I was over the side of my gig into his boat and pressing the muzzle of my rifle somewhere into his an-atomy with a prayer that the gun would go off if I wanted it to.

"Stow your noise, you yellow-livered

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swab," I hissed in his ear. "Sit tight or I'll blow your heathen soul to kingdom come."

There was a gasp and then a chuckle.

"Holy mother of cats!" I heard in my ear, "if it ain't Tim come out 'v the night, large as life! Take that gun off my ribs—Lord, the man's daffy, clean daffy."

It was Kid White, that tow-headed ship's nuisance, and here I was ready to put him away for good a moment ago. I sat back on a thwart and ran my hand over his ugly mug. Sure enough, it was that little imp; but how had he come there, and what was he doing sleeping in a boat this time of night hitched to a Wu Fang ship in the middle of a South Sea lagoon? He started a string of questions, until I put a paw gently over his mouth.

"Stow that, Kid," said I sternly, "and tell me how in blazes you got here by your lonesome. Talk low, because there's a mob of Chinks in the ship on top'v us."

"Sure there is," he chuckled, "and also a detachment of your beloved marines. I come along in the boat's crew with them, and they left me to hold the boats. So I had a nap until you——"

"All right, Kid," said I hastily, "all right. Do you mean to say that you and the marines rowed into the lagoon in a small boat during that hurricane?"

"Nothing of the sort," he answered. "We come in on the *Wabash* when the wind started to cut up."

The *Wabash*. I punched myself in the ribs to make sure I was awake and doing business, and not dreaming. There was no sign of the warship visible to me.

"How did that happen?" I asked.

"It was that fellow Dorgan," explained Kid White, pleased to be able to tell me something new. "He swam off from shore just before the storm, and had a long talk with Cole. Then Cole ordered half-speed ahead and we started right for the beach. I thought we was going to run ourselves aground, but the shore opened out into an inlet. The wind was tearing things loose behind us and for a while we had a bad time among the turns of the inlet until we come out into this lagoon, all snug and sound."

"Who took you in?"

"Dorgan did. He took the wheel like he knew what he was doing and got us through somehow. How he came to persuade Cole to risk it is beyond me; but I heard the two of them saying something about Old Jeff. Where is he, Mac?"

"Lord knows," said I, sober enough, "if he ain't on this ship."

So Dorgan had brought the cruiser into the harbor in spite of the hurricane. The man had his nerve with him, all right. Kid White explained why I couldn't see the cruiser. She lay on the other side of the Wu Fang ship, and when I first came out on the beach I hadn't seen her. Later I'd been too busy with the Chink to inspect the scenery. As soon as the cruiser had come to anchor and the wind had stopped Cole had gone off to the other ship with two boatloads of marines. That was several hours ago, and nothing had happened since then, except that Dorgan had disappeared. None of the boats was missing, so they guessed he must have slipped over the side and swum off to shore.

EVENTS were piling up thick by this time, and I asked the Kid what he'd learned about the Wu Fang ship. As usual he picked up a good bit.

"She's a new ship, of the Wu Fang Huan Line," he said, "bound for Valparaiso with a high-class cargo of silks and other stuff. She slipped in here to make some repairs to one of the boilers. The crew's mostly Chinks, with three or four white men."

"Who's the skipper?" I wanted to know.

"A man named Warren."

Somehow the name stuck in my mind as being familiar, but I couldn't place it then. The story sounded all right—only there was the affair of the morning to explain, and Old Jeff was gone. I decided to go up the side and look things over for myself. So with a word to the kid, I scrambled up the rope ladder and slipped over the side without being seen by the marines that lounged a ways down the deck.

It's funny, ain't it, the way some little thing will come up all of a sudden and show you a light ahead where you couldn't make out your own fore bitts a minute ago. It was that way with me. I'd started up the side of that Wu Fang ship without any clear idea of what I was going to do, or what sort of a ship she was. When I hit the deck I had an idea big as a house.

It was on account of the paint. There was paint stuck all over that ship. Climbing up the ladder I'd got it on my hands and shirt. And it was wet paint.

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Following my new idea I slipped up one of the ladders of the boat deck and felt my way along to where the stacks loomed up in the dark. The first one I come to was all right—iron, and warm to the touch. The second one was different. I felt of it for a moment; then I grinned to myself. It was canvas, canvas rigged up on spars—a dummy funnel. Subtract one from two and you get one. The ship had one funnel, not two, and also a brand new coat of paint. Moreover these things weren't to make her pretty; they was for a purpose. When I thought of the gun mounted on the fore-deck I had a hunch what that purpose was.

You get the idea, don't you? Well, bear along for a ways and it'll shape up. All day I'd been twisting my brains over that ship, and the Chinks, and rifles. I'd been adding two and two, and they made three every time. Now they made four. Dorgan knew what I knew now. But Dorgan had disappeared, and it was up to me to act on my own. I might be a square-head; still, when I figured out something and knew it was right I stuck to it. And now I knew the secret of the Wu Fang ship. The knowledge made me slip down to the marines and find out where Cole was.

He was in the charthouse with the skipper—had been there for three hours. I doubled back to the charthouse and persuaded the marine who stood by the door to let me in the party.

The light inside made me blink at first, and I guess the two officers were surprised to see me come in like that, with most of my shirt torn off by briers, and gray paint sticking all over my front. But I was too anxious to get what I knew out of my system to worry over my appearance.

Cole was seated facing me, his glasses and pale face making him look worried—which he was, most likely. A tall man with a red face in a blue uniform was seated at the table puffing at a cigar with a bottle of gin in front of him. He was Warren, I judged. And then I recalled when I'd heard that name before. He was the blackbirder that had owned a schooner with Dorgan.

Cole spoke first.

"What have you to report, MacGonigle?" he said sharply.

There was something I wanted to know before telling my story.

"Have you found Captain Bronson, sir?" I asked.

"We have been unable to find him," replied Cole, looking worried. "He is not on this ship, as he was reported to be."

Warren took the cigar out of his mouth and laughed.

"Of course he is not on my vessel, Lieutenant Cole. It's about time you understood that. Your men have been through the ship from peak to stern."

"I'm satisfied that Captain Bronson is not on your ship," assented Cole without much enthusiasm.

Warren took a drink from the glass at his hand and nodded.

"Apparently some of your men have taken a drop too much, and fixed up some story about Bronson being attacked by my men," resumed Warren, "but I can assure you that nothing of the kind took place. Probably Bronson is on the south beach now. You'll find him there in the morning.

"But he signaled us to come to the north shore," objected Cole.

"When was that?" snapped the other.

"About two o'clock——"

"That hardly agrees with the story you repeated to me that Captain Bronson was taken prisoner by some of my crew early this morning," broke in Warren, seeing his advantage. "Either the man lied that told you the story or you never got the signal. I don't care which, but I've reached the limit of my patience. I'll give you twenty minutes to take your men off my deck."

Cole's glance wavered from him to me. He wasn't the man to step into things at a pinch—which was bad for me just then.

"Beg your pardon, sir," said I, saluting "but I have something to tell you."

He nodded, and I went ahead with my story, repeating how Old Jeff had been attacked on the beach, and how I just escaped being shot, and about the signal we'd sent him. I didn't mention Dorgan's name, nor the dummy funnel, keeping those in reserve. Warren took it all calmly, and shook his head when I was through.

"We heard no shots on the ship," he snapped, "nor were my men armed when they went ashore. I haven't got a monopoly on all the Chinamen in this island. I've already explained to you that this is one of the Wu Fang Huan steamers, cargo silk, for Valparaiso. You've seen my papers, and master's certificate." He jerked his thumb at some papers on the desk. "It's piracy to keep your men on my ship because

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you can't get in touch with your skipper."

"Beg pardon, sir," said I to him, "but are all your men on the ship now?"

He gave me a sharp glance, and his eyes were about as loving as a coiled snake.

"They are all accounted for," he replied.

"Did you know one of them was ashore with a gig from your ship, "I went on. "He had a rifle, a Lee-Enfield, like the others had this morning. I brought it off with me. Would you care to see it?"

"Where's the man?" Warren barked.

"I left him on the beach," said I, "seeing as how he tried to shoot me when I approached him."

"There's nothing to prove he's a member of my crew," Warren retorted.

He turned to Cole and kept driving at him about piracy, and his rights as a skipper until Cole's brain got muddled trying to think what to do. Warren got out his papers again and shoved them at him, and Cole glanced them over without saying much. Meanwhile I was going over my idea again to see if it was sound and watertight at every point. I knew Warren's game, and it was time for a showdown.

"You put in here to make repairs to the boilers, didn't you, sir?" I asked him first chance I got.

"Yes, they needed attention after our long run across the Pacific. I knew of this harbor, and ran in to be safe from a hurricane if one happened along. Are you satisfied?" he barked at Cole.

"And you put a coat of paint on the ship at the same time?" I kept at him.

"Some time ago," he evaded.

"Not so long ago, because I got a lot on my shirt coming over the side a while ago." I told him. "And while you were doing that you rigged up a dummy funnel, along with a gun on the fore-deck."

His red face got a shade deeper and his eyes narrowed.

"My affairs are my own," he snapped. "What I do on my ship is no one's business. What's more——"

"Did you see the dummy funnel, MacGonigle?" interrupted Cole.

"I did, sir," I told him, but watching Warren. "Canvas and spars it was. Moreover, there's something Captain Warren will have to explain to you." I stepped over to the desk and caught up some letters that were half hidden under a chart. "Why are these letters addressed to Captain Southerland, Red Belt liner *Bangkok*?"

I leaned over the desk and shook my fist in Warren's face.

"Ask him, sir," I cried to Cole, "why this vessel left Hongkong as the *Bangkok*, with Captain Southerland, a decent man as skipper and a few score Chinamen stowed away in her hold. She didn't have any gun on her then, but a ways out from port she changed her hands. Ask Warren how it was done, how him and the other renegades with him overpowered the master of the ship and the officers that stuck by him and took the vessel over with the help of the coolies they had sneaked aboard at Hongkong. It doesn't take much explaining to guess why he put in here, a place he knew of from his days at blackbirding among the islands, and slapped a new coat of paint over her, and rigged up that extra funnel. This was the ship we missed in the dark, and it's the *Bangkok* right enough, in the hands of a mutinous crew. Ask him what that gun's for? And get him to tell you where Southerland and Captain Bronson are. He knows."

Warren and Cole both sprang up, and there was dynamite in the air.

"You swab!" shouted Warren, "you say I'm a blackbirder——"

"Dorgan told me," I said boldly, using the man's name for the first time. "He's on to your game. He's the one that brought the cruiser into the harbor and risked his life to do it——"

I ended with a lurch across the table. Warren had flushed at Dorgan's name. He shot a quick glance around, at the marine at the door, and his hand came up from his side with an automatic lying in it. His game was up, he knew that when he heard Dorgan's name, I guess, and he made a last bid for success. His first shot sought the oil lamp overhead, but he'd been drinking and it went a bit wide. The next instant I had him by the arm, with a stream of lead squirting from his weapon all about the cabin. Between the two of us we managed to miss Cole, and the marine hopped in to help me. For a marine, he did well enough, and we stretched Warren out, taking his gun away from him.

"The crew!" shouted Cole to me. "Get our men together on the deck."

I skipped out'v the charthouse to the bridge and piped a call of all hands at the

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falls—the first one that came into my head. They came running up to the fore-deck, and I saw Kid White pop over the side, waving the rifle I'd brought off with me. Cole called for some of them to guard the gun while he took the rest through the ship.

It was lively enough for a time, with the marines pulling coolies from their bunks and hiding places and herding them for'ard under guard. The only ones that put up a fight were the white men who were in with Warren in his dirty scheme, and these we handled like the scum they were. Oh they was a pretty pirate's crew, and if we hadn't butted in just then I reckon they'd have made history on the Pacific, while the innocent public put down the missing ships to the credit of some of the sea raiders of the various nations at war.

VI

OLD JEFF? We saw him again early the next morning. When Cole had the Wu Fang ship to rights, and the arms we found on her confiscated, he began making preparations for a landing party to comb the island for Old Jeff. I told him about the gig I'd run across on the sand, and putting two and two together, we come to the conclusion that Warren had smuggled his captives ashore before the men from the *Wabash* boarded him. I didn't say anything about the man I'd seen caught in the bush, but I was anxious to get ashore.

When dawn lit up the lagoon, and the water began to turn that deep bluish tinge, all the marines and half the crew were mustered on the cruiser for a shore party to search for Old Jeff. And maybe they weren't keen to go, though! Every man on the ship asked to be taken. I knew it would break Kid White's heart to be left behind, and I doubted we could do it anyway, so I took him with me to see he kept out of trouble as much as possible.

We was in the first boat, the Kid and I, with Cole and a Maxim stuck in the bow, and we'd just grounded in the sand when some one called a halt and we brought up all standing, listening to what was going on.

It was loud enough to be heard clear out to the ship—a jumble of shouting and the beat of the wooden drums I'd seen in the village. The next moment the brush parted just where Cole had the Maxim trained on it, and we saw a procession come out. First there was about a hundred little pickaninnies running ahead; then a bunch of Malaita boys. They were all in good spirits. I recognized George among the lot.

In the middle of the throng was Dorgan. Then all the men in the boats let out a shout, because they caught sight of Old Jeff in the procession with skipper and mates of the *Bangkok*. We forgot all about the Maxim and rushed for the beach, to crowd around Old Jeff and tell him how glad we was to see him.

I picked George out of the crowd and asked him in my best *bêche-de-mer* lingo how the white men had got to the village. George grinned and lit his pipe with some new tobacco as a sign of festivity.

"Wind come long time, big fella," he explained. "Wind go away, come Chinaman fella with white men, leave'm village along Malaita fella. Marster Dorgan come along by'm-by, my word, him devil-devil big, say 'My word, you black fella, hurt these white men, you'll be knocked seven bells, double time along me—savve?' Malaita fella savve, bring white men along ship double time."

I wondered what had become of the coolies who had visited the village. George wasn't communicative on this point though, and I guessed they had managed to get back to the ship, possibly. I say possibly, for there was the man running through the bush in the night. . . .

Well, Dorgan's a quartermaster now on one of the new dreadnaughts he used to hear about on the island. Old Jeff is captain of the big ship, and I suspect that's why Dorgan's there. We don't talk much about what happened on the island, he and I, but once I asked him how he came to know about the Wu Fang Huan ship before we did. He cocked his eye at me and grinned.

"Remember Warren and I sailed together once," he said, "and he used to tell me how he planned to turn just that trick, and he said he'd call the ship one of the Wu Fang Huan steamers. You didn't know that, Mac, and when you come dead across my bows I had to lay you out. There was nothing else to do."

"I guess that's right," I admitted.

Only don't try any mush stuff on Dorgan. There was a fellow once that called him a reformed man, and spent a week in sick bay for his pains.

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YANCEY OF THE RANGERS

by Hugh Pendexter

Author of "In the Shadow of Pontiac," "The Magic Arrow," etc.

SIR EDMUND ANDROS, the new Governor of the colony of New York, eyed the tall, lank ranger dubiously. Yancey, clad in fringed and soiled forest dress, was ill at ease and his lean face held rather a stupid expression as he waited to be addressed. Sir Edmund glanced again at Colonel Fenton's letter, which assured him the bearer was one of his most trustworthy men, well acquainted with the Iroquois country and the best fitted for the governor's business.

"You believe you could travel among the Iroquois and learn what they are up to?" asked Sir Edmund.

For a second a flicker of amusement livened the ranger's face, and he drawled—

"I opine so."

"Then listen attentively. Grangula, the Onondaga——"

"We allers call him Big Mouth," broke in Yancey with a display of interest.

The governor frowned and repeated: "Grangula, the Onondaga, and Dekanisora, Onondaga, have recently returned evasive answers to our request that they come to Albany and attend a council. They speak for all the Five Nations except the Mohawks, and our Mohawks, I fear, will show us the same indifference once they learn of the Onondagas' answer. Your work is to find out what new deviltry the league may be up to. I have no doubt but what Denonville and his French spies are behind it. By heavens! Never were such savages! English goods are much cheaper than French goods, and yet they may be dickering with the French."

"They like our goods best, but they like French manners best," lazily informed Yancey. "Our rum'll win out against their brandy; our goods beat their goods easy. But when it comes to making of 'em and living with 'em the French skin us a mile. If the Iroquois can't get fur they're determined Canada sha'n't. For two years they've been fighting the Western Indians just enough to keep them from trapping and to prevent what pelts that's been taken from coming down the Lakes and up the St. Lawrence. As a result, no one has been getting beaver and every one's getting ugly, the Western tribes along with Canada, Iroquois and us English.

"I'll scout out to Onondaga, where they hold their league councils and see what I can pick up. Old Split-Nose will tell me anything if he's drunk enough. That's all you want of me?"

"That's all; only lose not an hour."

Yancey stared at him blankly, then grinned at the humor of the suggestion.

"Do you opine I'd hang 'round this settlement from choice?" he whimsically inquired. "Why, down here you can't move without bumping into a house or a Dutchman. I'll go up the Hudson tonight, and I won't feel to home till my moccasins hit the Mohawk trail."

With that breezy assurance he readjusted his fur cap and its long tail, and lounged from the room, leaving the governor very doubtful as to his fitness for the service.

But Colonel Fenton had picked his man wisely: of all his rangers there was none

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with more knowledge of the country and Indian character than Yancey.

At the close of this, the seventeenth century, the French and English had a lasting bone of contention between them—the beaver trade. Canada lived on beaver with the West and Northwest furnishing the peltries. In this year of 1688 Denonville represented Louis XIV in Canada, and Andros handled affairs in the new world for James II, with Canada and the New York province fighting a duel to the death, the fur trade being the stake.

Another important factor in the equation was the Five Nations. The Iroquois depended upon Albany for supplies and munitions, which they could procure only with beaver. And there was no longer a commercial quantity of beaver in the Iroquois country. Canada must have beaver or starve. The Iroquois must have beaver or drop back to the plane of bow and arrow, which would be equivalent to extermination. England, if she were to dominate the continent, must check the growth of the French, and this could be accomplished only by blockading the fur trade and preventing it passing up the St. Lawrence. It resulted that the rivals bent all their energies to control the beaver trade at its source—the Michilimackinac country.

But while Canada was a unit in aggression the provinces were handicapped by their lack of co-operation. The English expanded slowly, pausing to make safe each mile reclaimed from the forest. Their Northern neighbors cared nothing for homes and agriculture, but made long jumps to far distant places, where they won the good will of the Indians by their considerate treatment and the activity of their priests. Early in the contest they secured the lead and sent the furs up the St. Lawrence. This advantage resulted in an invasion of the Illinois country by the Iroquois; for only by conquering the tribes focusing about Michilimackinac, and compelling them to send their annual output of peltries through the Western Door of the Long House, thence to Albany, could the Five Nations hope to maintain their ancient prestige as the greatest fighting-machine on the continent. Thus for two years the output of furs had been reduced to a minimum, with Canada and all the tribes becoming impoverished. The English colonies suffered the least because of their agricultural resources.

By finesse and bribes, by priests and brandy, French agents obtained permission to set up posts at Michilimackinac and other strategic points until they bid fair to hold the trade for all time. The annual arrival of the immense flotilla of fur-laden canoes meant comfort and luxury for Canada throughout the long Winter. A failure of the furs to get through, from any cause, spelled misery and suffering.

To offset French goods and French brandy were English goods at a cheaper price, and English rum. When the furs were deflected south through the Long House to Albany the Five Nations and the province of New York rejoiced and waxed fat. As both competitors knew the Iroquois could make or mar the plans of either, and actually held the balance of power, there was a never-ceasing campaign of pressure brought to bear on the Long House from New York and Montreal.

Grangula, or Big Mouth, as Yancey and his fellow-rangers called him, was shrewd enough to perceive his people fared best so long as they were committed to neither French nor English; for by remaining neutral they received presents and flattering attentions from both sides. But there came a time when they had to choose, and on their choice the cabinets at London and Paris awaited most anxiously.

Because of the war between the Iroquois and the Western tribes the beaver trade was at a standstill at the time of the ranger's visit to the governor. Canada was desperate. The effect on the Five Nations also was marked and renowned warriors were wearing old blankets. The Western tribes were ripe for a final effort, under French leadership, to release their furs. The English continued to develop their farms, content to go without furs so long as the deprivation was reducing Canada.

Yancey knew all this, and much more he had not bothered to tell the governor. Trained by the forest to observe and analyze, he knew the discontent infecting the Long House from end to end must result in a bloody invasion of Canada, or some form of peace with that country, which would give the Iroquois satisfactory commercial terms.

Geographically the Iroquois were allied with the English, and the ranger knew

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Denonville must do one of two things to remove the paralysis from the fur trade and prevent an atack on Canada: crush the Iroquois in their own country, or arrange a peace with them which would provide for some form of partnership. Serious obstacles must be overcome in carrying out an invasion. England claimed the Iroquois as her subjects; and while the Five Nations denied they were the subjects of any country, they would, in case of attack, demand and receive support.

Even should the French break into the Long House they would find the savages fled to the dark forests and resorting to incessant bush-fighting. The crops and villages might be burned, but after the invaders withdrew, fighting a rear-guard action to their canoes, the English would rush in supplies to retain the Iroquois' alliance. Some who knew the bitter feuds between the Long House and Canada would ridicule the suggestion of the second alternative—peace.

The ranger knew French agents had been at work among the Western tribes during the previous Summer and Winter, endeavoring to bind them securely to the cause of France. Nevertheless he considered it possible for Denonville to attempt at least a truce till the pent-up furs once more could carpet the St. Lawrence. And he further surmised that the haughty Iroquois would not treat such an offer with the same contempt they had displayed in the past.

EARLY Summer had brought the first soft foliage to the woods when the ranger trailed his long rifle along the old Mohawk trail on his way to the Great Council Fire ever burning in the valley of Onondaga. As his moccasins trod the moist moss and left their imprint in the black, damp mold, his thoughts were far in advance of his lank body, ranging the gloomy wood and seeking to read the riddle of the Onondagas' refusal to attend the council at Albany. Appreciating the poverty of the Five Nations, he knew the counter-attraction must be strong.

"If the Nations expected war they'd be piling into Albany fast enough," he mused. "Yet an honest peace with the French don't seem reasonable, for the Iroquois'll fight the Western tribes to the last drop of blood. They know it's their death sentence if the Michilimackinac Injuns git the upper hand. But if they made believe they was willing to make peace with Montreal they'd git this province all stewed up and willing to cover them with presents. That would be more like old Big Mouth's style. And during these dull times us English ain't put ourselves out to please them."

As he threaded his way through the hollows and hills of the Onondaga country he visited several small villages and was impressed by the subtle atmosphere of expectancy permeating each. His treatment, too, while outwardly the same as when last their guest, lacked something.

"Pleasant enough," he mumbled as he reached the valley of the Onondaga and proceeded to follow the little stream to the end of his journey. "Pleasant enough, yet they seemed to be waiting for me to git out. That's it; they wanted me to git out."

Now to discover why he was not welcome. This would furnish the key to the problem which was vexing Albany and New York. As he advanced up the valley it became more obvious that something was afoot which the Indians preferred to keep covered up. That the Iroquois did not forbid him the country evidenced they had not as yet committed themselves to any purpose. As he proceeded he saw Cayugas, Oneidas and Senecas, but no Mohawks.

Arriving at the village of Onondaga, the capital of the Federation, he stopped at the lodge of Split-Nose, an old acquaintance. This stood on the outskirts of the village, surrounded by patches of corn and beans. On entering the ranger was sullenly greeted by Split-Nose's squaw, who almost immediately rose and departed. Ordinarily she would have run to him, her face animated by the expectation of some gift. Registering her behavior in the back of his mind he looked about for Split-Nose.

The Indian was on a couch of robes, deep in a drunken slumber, and beside him was a vessel half filled with liquor. Yancey sampled it, then whistled softly. It was brandy. As a precursor of news favorable to the English it should have been rum. The ranger's mind at once bristled with many suspicions. He seated himself beside the Indian and waited. At last the sleeper roused himself and reached for the liquor but stopped on beholding the ranger.

"What does my brother do among the Hodisennageta?" asked Split-Nose.

In Iroquois councils the Onondaga were

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known as the Hodisennageta—"they are the name bearers"—and its use by the drunken warrior confirmed Yancey's suspicion that important matters were being debated by representatives of at least four of the five tribes.

"I come to go on a hunt with my red brother. I am thirsty but find only brandy. Has the Onondaga no rum?"

"Rum is a squaw's drink," mumbled Split-Nose. "Drink deep of the brandy. There is much of it in the valley."

Yancey filled and lighted his pipe and glanced about the room. Bright cloths, new, hung by the fireplace. No wonder his little gifts were no longer sought by the squaw of Split-Nose.

"The Hodisennageta are rich. They have told Corlaer (Iroquois name for the governor of New York) they are poor. Perhaps the brandy came in such a great stream it floated many presents into Onondaga," observed the ranger.

Split-Nose struggled to his elbow, his bloodshot eyes searching Yancey's face sharply. Then his gutteral voice warned:

"Listen, my white brother, who has smoked the calumet with my people many times. The Mohawk path back to Corlaer on the Hudson is smooth and full of singing birds and sweet flowers; follow it. Other paths are rough and filled with briars and lead to traps. I have spoken."

And dropping back he drew the blanket over his face and simulated deep slumber. Yancey knew further efforts here were useless and walked outdoors.

"Safer for me to go back to Albany, eh?" he mused, staring across the garden at the long bark council-house. "Brandy—Frenchmen. There's a big game afoot—and Andros is waiting to hear the truth."

He hesitated but a moment before determining upon a bold course. Crossing the cultivated land he mounted the slight rise to the council-house. Swift glances were cast at him as he neared the group of warriors before the entrance. He noted representatives of every tribe in the league excepting the Mohawks.

"The Eastern Door is still guarded," he muttered. "But how long before it opens, once the Mohawks receive word the Senecas are here?"

His attention was next attracted to a small party of Indians standing at one side. He quickly recognized them as Catholic Iroquois, long since won from their old allegiance to the Long House by French priests, and now living on the St. Regis just beyond the Canadian border. A child should know they would never venture back among their pagan kinsmen unless granted safe conduct and accompanied by their protectors, the French.

As the ranger glided to the entrance a Cayuga brave stepped before him, blocking his path. With a fierce oath Yancey drew up his six-feet-two of bone and muscle, and for a moment glared down into the Cayuga's snaky eyes, and demanded—

"How long since Hojiagede (fish-carrier) stands guard over the Great Council House for the Hodisennageta?"

The brave trembled with fury and plucked at his ax, but stepped aside. Without a look at the others Yancey passed inside and composedly seated himself on a mat and gazed about. Big Mouth, whom he knew well, was speaking, and paused to glare in angry annoyance at the intruder. Back of Big Mouth sat Dekanisora, the orator. Ranged on either side of him were chiefs from the Oneida, Cayuga and Seneca tribes. Opposite the savages sat two French officers. These jumped up, as though to protest against the ranger's presence, but Big Mouth gestured for them to be seated, saying:

"WHAT words I speak are open to the four winds. That the Englishman may know what I have said, and tell it all to Corlaer, I say again the Iroquois are the subjects of neither the English nor the French. They received this country from the Great Spirit and they never have been conquered."

"Ho! ho!" indorsed the chiefs behind him, deep in their throats.

"Frenchmen, I give you these words to carry to Onontio (the governor of Canada). Tell Onontio our scouts have seen the weakness of Canada. Tell him that when the grain is ripe the Long House can sweep over the land and destroy all growing things and the cattle and the settlements. Tell him that the soldiers in the forts will then surrender or starve. This is my answer to Onontio's words that we must make peace with him, or he will bring an army here.

"Ask him for the Iroquois what he expects to kill? The trees? Or does he believe the Summer sun has burned away

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the forests and left us open to attack? Onontio says for us to come to Montreal and smoke the pipe and talk terms of peace into a belt. In the name of the Senecas, Cayugas, Onondagas, Oneidas I thank him for offering us the calumet of peace—but birds have told me that he is planning to knock us in the head with the help of our enemies, the Western Indians."

"Ho! ho!" chorused the chiefs.

"Tell Onontio we took goods from the French traders, as he says. We did so because they were carrying arms to the Illinois, our ancient enemies. Tell Onontio we did lead English traders to the Great Lakes, as he says. But we are born free and go where we will, trade with whom we will, and take with us whom we will. It is true we knocked the Illinois in the head. But they had cut down the tree of peace and hunted beaver on our land."

"Ho! ho!" grunted the chiefs.

"Tell Onontio the Five Nations will dance the dance of the calumet beneath the branches of the peace-tree and never dig up the hatchet till French or English attack the Long House. Then tell Onontio this, and tell him to listen with both ears: the Illinois and their kinsmen and neighbors are our enemies. They are bad flesh. They have dropped every chain of friendship ever placed in their hand. The Five Nations will knock them in the head for what they have done and for what they now plan to do. If Onontio wants peace with the Long House he can have it. But there shall be no white wampum between us and the Western Indians."

"Ho! ho!" exploded the grim chiefs.

Yancey now knew the answer to the riddle. The French envoys, laden with brandy and presents, had urged a general peace which should include their Western allies. Big Mouth, speaking for the federation, had accepted the gifts and was ready to talk the terms of peace "into white wampum," but was unwilling to include Canada's Western allies in the treaty.

With a glance of hatred at the ranger one of the envoys rose and talked, confirming each sentence by delivering a belt.

"Brothers, with this belt I open the eyes of the Iroquois that you may see the truth. I open the ears of the Iroquois that they may hear Onontio's voice in Montreal. I clear the road to the peace council at Montreal. I wipe out sorrow and anger from your hearts. I cover the dead and wash the red ax clean of blood.

"Brothers, by all these belts we ask you to send envoys at once to Montreal to arrange the terms of a lasting peace. With the next sun we start back to Onontio. What answer shall we carry him?"

Yancey leaned forward and waited anxiously for the answer of the Five Nations. He was convinced they would never bury the hatchet with the Indian allies of Canada. And it was hard to believe that Denonville would conclude a peace that did not take in the Western tribes.

It was Dekanisora who rose to reply. Now he had no ambition to score as an orator, and simply replied:

"We accept the belts from Onontio and we will send chiefs to Montreal on this understanding: the peace shall not cover the Hurons, nor any Indians on the Western lakes who have warred against the Iroquois. This is the last word of the Five Nations. Frenchmen, is the road to Montreal still open?"

And as he put the vital question he extended to the officers a belt of white wampum, bisected lengthwise by a black string of beads to represent the "road" between the Long House and Montreal.

Yancey drew his heels beneath him, eager to start from the council and start for Albany with the news. The Oneida chief rose and hurried forth. The ranger hoped this meant the Oneida tribe was withdrawing from the council. One of the officers stood up and replied:

"The road is open on the terms you name. I take your belt. Let your envoys travel by the way of La Famine, where soldiers from Fort Frontenac will meet them and take them across the lake. From Frontenac they will be escorted to Onontio at Montreal, who will have received your belt and the peace ready for you to sign."

"Damned if they ain't knuckling under and throwing their Hurons overboard," gasped Yancey, gliding to the door. "The quicker this news is in Albany the better it'll be with the province. Lawd! if the Mohawks should open the Eastern Door——"

He paused, finding his exit barred. The door refused to give. He stood there, a prisoner, till the members of the council joined him and Big Mouth had tapped on the portal. When the door opened Yancey

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discovered it was the Oneida chief, who had withdrawn so precipitantly, who had prevented his egress.

"M'sieu is in a haste to return to New York where he will see us soon," remarked one of the officers, bowing graciously.

"I'll see both of you in an Iroquois kettle before snow flies," growled Yancey. Then to Big Mouth, "Why is the door bolted against the going of Grangula's brother?"

"The Iroquois love the English," calmly replied Big Mouth. "When the Tall Turkey brings sunshine to Onondaga the Iroquois want to keep him with them."

"Grangula's words are warm because his hands are warm from tightly holding the chain of friendship," replied Yancey. "May the Great Spirit see that none of the Iroquois are held in Montreal by a cold hand. There was a time when Iroquois visited Montreal and were sent to the French king as slaves to paddle his big canoes."

Big Mouth's eyes glittered at this reminder of the time when Louis of France had ordered "stout Iroquois" be sent him to serve as galley-slaves. One of the Frenchmen hastily broke in:

"Those Iroquois have been returned, with presents. All has been forgotten."

"It has gone like the old snows," gravely said Dekanisora.

Only Yancey knew it would never be forgotten; and the thought gave him satisfaction, although Big Mouth's flowery words had informed him that he was a prisoner until the new peace could be completed and all the agreements "talked into" the wampum. With a rare smile lighting his countenance he pressed Big Mouth by the hand and declared:

"I was hungry to enjoy the hospitality and friendship of the Hodisennageta. My stay with Onondaga can not be too long."

An hour later he had vanished from the village. Big Mouth was too shrewd a politician not to realize that a premature announcement of the new peace would prove embarrassing. The fear he might conclude such a peace would bring many presents from the English; the knowledge he already had sent belts would stop all supplies from Albany.

He sent his swiftest runners to the Oneidas in the East, directing them to throw a cordon across the country and seal all trails. Behind the runners proceeded a hundred Onondaga braves with orders to overtake and bring the ranger back. But Yancey had forseen this pursuit and decided the longest route to the Hudson was the shortest and hastened north toward Lake Ontario.

LA FAMINE was at the mouth of Salmon River, north of Oswego River. Yancey had hoped to make that point ahead of the Frenchmen and their Indian escort. Did he succeed, he purposed destroying all their canoes but one, thus delaying their return to Fort Frontenac—Kingston—while he made Black River and followed its upper waters, thus returning to Albany north of, and parallel to, the Mohawk trail.

He had no difficulty in passing through the Seneca country as the tribe knew nothing of Big Mouth's desire to recapture him. He was within a short distance of the lake when he detected Indians in the bush on one side of the trail. Thinking them Senecas he called out his Indian name of "Tall Turkey," and never entertained a thought of danger till they suddenly burst from cover and disarmed him. Then he discovered they were Hurons.

Exhausted by his continuous flight and the lack of food he offered no resistance as his captors hurried him to the mouth of the river. The Hurons as allies of the French would lose no time in putting an Englishman to the torture. Yancey spoke French and had a smattering of Michilimackinac dialects, but there was no disguising the fact that he was English. As they reached the beach there came a subdued whoop of joy, and the next moment forty Hurons were dancing about him and menacing him with knives and tomahawks.

The demand that he be burned at once was general. But their chief, a tall, imposing man, restrained them, saying—

"Let him be taken across to Frontenac that our French brothers may help us."

The warriors who had effected the capture, being impatient for the sport, demurred to this ruling, whereat their leader hushed them by sternly rebuking—

"Adario has spoken and it is well."

Adario was as well known among the Western tribes as Big Mouth was among the Five Nations. By the whites he was called the Rat. Yancey exclaimed—

"Adario *ou le* Rat?"

"The English know and fear the Rat,"

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was the proud reply. "He holds the chain of friendship with the French. That chain is so strong and heavy it will crush all the English between the Stinking Water and Michilimackinac."

Admiration and homage, blended almost into an expression of pleasure, shone in the ranger's homely countenance. His voice was clear and earnest as he cried—

"If I must be roasted, let it be by the brave Hurons rather than by treacherous Iroquois dogs."

"The Englishman has hunted many times with those same dogs," sneered the Rat. "Does he think the Rat's ears are dead not to have heard the English plotting with the Iroquois to knock the Hurons in the head? Does he think the Rat is blind, and that he has not seen the English guns in the hands of the Iroquois to be pointed at the breasts of the Hurons and their brave allies, the French?"

The flicker of hope burned higher, and with increasing boldness Yancey assured:

"The Rat is neither blind in eye nor ear. But he has been many sleeps in paddling his canoes from Michilimackinac and has not heard the voices whispering in the forest. He is here because the French have begged him to come and help make war on the Iroquois. He remembers the brandy and presents sent him by Onontio. He can repeat the words of Onontio's last message, 'Come with the new leaf and bring red axes and join me on the warpath.'"

"The Hurons have come, bringing their red axes," grunted the Rat, perplexed by the prisoner's words and confident bearing.

"And what will the Rat and his warriors say when he hears the French, after asking his aid, gives the chain of friendship to the Iroquois?" demanded Yancey.

"We say the Englishman lies and shall have his double tongue burned out!" screamed the Rat. "Ho! my children, he shall be left at the stake here, for his friends, the Senecas, to find."

With a yell of exultation the warriors collected dry wood and trimmed a small tree into a post and commenced preparing Yancey for the ordeal. Still the ranger's words had aroused uneasy thoughts in the chief's ever suspicious mind; and even as they were dragging him to the stake the ranger noted the doubt in the Huron's lowering gaze, and loudly persisted:

"The Rat is afraid of the truth. Even now Denonville buries the hatchet with the Iroquois. I was at the Great Council House of the Onondagas and heard the terms Grangula agreed to."

The Rat's fierce visage betrayed additional uneasiness. He was far from home, and only the belief that he had friendly Canada at his back emboldened him to visit the Seneca country with two score braves and without waiting for the other Canadian tribes who followed him. He gestured for his warriors to fall back, and confronting the ranger sullenly demanded—

"What did Grangula, the dog, say?"

"That he picked up the chain of friendship offered by Onontio but that the Hurons should not help hold the chain. Onontio answered he was ready to talk those words into the wampum."

In a surge of fury the Rat raised his ax to dash out the captive's brains on the spot. By a mighty effort he controlled himself, and, lowering the ax, hissed:

"The Englishman shall repeat his words at Frontenac. Then the French shall see what the Hurons do with such a liar."

"It is well," calmly declared the ranger. "Go to the fort and tell the commander you have brought your axes. Say nothing of what I have said till he has answered you. Then let me be tortured or set free, according to his words."

THE Huron warriors with their captive remained apart from the fort while the Rat and several chiefs went to report their arrival to the commandant. All the way across the lake the Rat had repeatedly told himself the Englishman had lied to gain time. He dwelt on how he would burn out each false word with exquisite torture. The ranger was very strong and could be kept alive for days, till only a charred stump remained. The Rat could not, however, still the uneasiness in his savage breast as he noted the lack of war-like preparation about the fort. Where was the army Denonville had promised should meet the Western allies at Frontenac?

On entering the fort his unrest increased as the commandant came forward to meet him with a file of soldiers lounging behind him. His speech was flowery with welcome but it could not conceal the restraint in his manner. He pointed to the brandy ready for his guests and called the Rat his

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brother. The Rat's face hardened into an expressionless mask. Ignoring the brandy and the pipes he gazed about him for a minute, then abruptly asked—

"Where are the soldiers of Onontio?"

It was a disagreeable task. The commandant knew how the Hurons had been induced by all sorts of promises to paddle the weary lengths of the Huron, the Erie and Ontario to join in the long planned invasion of the Five Nations.

"Brothers," he slowly began, "Onontio is very wise. He loves his children from Michilimackinac. He is sending presents from Montreal for them to take back home. And much brandy. He will pay them more for beaver than the English will."

The Rat's strong visage lost none of its imperturbability at this circumlocution. His voice was calm as he said:

"The Hurons will go to Montreal, where the soldiers are. After we have knocked the Iroquois in the head we will take our presents home."

The commandant glanced to make sure his soldiers were alert, and bluntly informed:

"There will be no war. Onontio loves all his red children. The Onondagas are sending deputies to Montreal to make a lasting peace so that all the Indians may hunt the beaver and bury the ax."

For more than a minute the Huron chief stared at him fixedly. The Hurons, the most stable of the Western tribes, were the van of the Indian force gathered, in some instances, from points more than a thousand miles from the Long House. They had left their villages and trapping to make the long journey. And this was the reward for all their efforts.

Catching up the blanket from his loins the Rat drew it about him and tersely said—

"It is well."

The Englishman had spoken with a straight tongue. When the Rat said, "It is well," he spoke from a bitterness of spirit which only those who face extermination can experience. Evil the day for the Hurons and their neighbors! Onontio made a peace that would sacrifice his red allies on the altar of the Iroquois hate and send many a brave into the kettles of the Five Nations. For Onontio was powerless to protect Michilimackinac from the vengeance of the Long House once the peace treaty was signed.

In single file the warriors returned to the camp. Without a word the Rat removed the rawhide thong from the ranger's waist and arms, and motioned him to get into a canoe. His braves, thirsting for brandy and the torture of the white man, witnessed this maneuver with amazement. Stepping into the canoe with Yancey the Rat laconically informed:

"Onontio does not need our axes. He makes peace with the Iroquois."

Consternation and fury distorted each countenance. There was none in the band who did not interpret the astounding announcement as the death warrant for the Western tribes. Did their neighbors possess their fortitude an Iroquois invasion might be met. But Ottawa and Ojibway, Potawatomi and Sac, although individually brave, could not be depended upon for any coordinated and lasting resistance.

Fickle as children in their moods there was no linking them together to oppose the iron will of the Five Nations, who conducted warfare with the solidarity of a Roman legion. With no effort to conceal their haste the entire party embarked, the shadow of the great menace already falling cold upon them.

"The Great Huron finds the Englishman's words are true," remarked Yancey as the canoes glided down the lake.

"The Rat has been asleep. He is awake," was the terse reply.

"The Onondaga chiefs even now are on their way to Montreal," said Yancey.

"Soho!" grunted the chief.

"They are to gather at La Famine and wait for soldiers to come from Frontenac."

"Hoho!" This time there was a new note in his deep voice, a ring of inspiration that might betoken triumph. With a sweep of the paddle he changed the course and headed for the mouth of the Salmon.

The ranger bit his lips in chagrin at having imparted the last bit of information. He had hoped to win permission to leave the band at the Niagara River to hasten back to the Hudson through the wilds of the Pennsylvania province. It would be his last wish to be mixed up in any Huron scheme of vengeance. Once the Rat met and attacked the peace embassy the peace pact between the Iroquois and French would be cemented, as the former would never rest till they had glutted their revenge on the Western tribes; and this

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could not be done unless they were at peace with the French.

Such an encounter as the Rat undoubtedly was planning would also be disastrous to the exposed English settlements on the Hudson; for it would open the direct route from Montreal across Lake Champlain, heretofore guarded by the Mohawks in the Eastern Door. The Mohawks had not participated with their elder brothers—Onondagas and Senecas—at the peace preliminaries in the vale of Onondaga; but the ranger knew only too well how quickly they would raise the ax once the Hurons struck their desperate blow.

"The Hurons have lost their way. This is not the path to Michilimackinac," Yancey at last ventured to remind.

"It is a good path. It is the only path to peace," was the enigmatic response.

FOR five days the Hurons remained hidden at La Famine, and Yancey's heart was beating high with hope when the word was whispered that canoes were putting in. Held low in the bush, with death his portion did he betray the presence of his captors, Yancey recognized the Onondaga envoys. There were four chiefs and several warriors. Dekanisora was the leader of the embassy. Once they landed they died; and dead, they brought misery and death to the upper Hudson.

The ranger saw Dutch Schenectady, carelessly guarded, fall an easy prey. He heard the shrieks of the women and the wailing of children. He beheld the bloody aftermath of the raid, followed by a frenzied assault on Albany, fifteen miles away. It was a crisis when a man must act, no matter how futile his endeavor, no matter what fate his attempt might incur. It was a matter of conscience, when the fear of the Lord stalks through the soul and leaves no alternative. Polite verbiage sometimes styles it "dying for an ideal."

So, because he had no choice, Yancey opened his lips to shout, only to have a blanket stuffed down his throat while his face was pressed into the wet moss. Half suffocated he remained thus, two Hurons kneeling on his back and head. He heard the volley and was released, as with their war-cry the Hurons rushed from cover.

Staggering to his feet he beheld a Huron dead a few rods from the ambuscade, an Onondaga chief dead, and a wounded warrior darting into the woods. The remainder of the envoys were being surrounded and disarmed. Sick at heart he moved closer. The Rat was exulting over his captives.

"The Iroquois are blind men," he cried. "When Onontio asked the Hurons if they dared come here and capture the Iroquois the Hurons laughed and said, 'If our villages were near we would send our women and children with sticks to whip the Iroquois.' "

Dekanisora heard this with astonishment and gathering rage convulsing his stern visage. When he spoke it was in a voice choked with passion.

"Hurons, we are your prisoners," he began. "Do you dare speak the truth to a prisoner? If so, tell me what you mean by saying Onontio told you to attack a peace party of the Five Nations."

"Ho!" scoffed the Rat. "A peace party sent to what village? I know of no Indians living in this country but the Iroquois. Perhaps the Onondagas have lost their way, or think the sun has taken a new path, and that by coming to Ontario they will reach the Cherokee below the Tennessee."

Dekanisora haughtily answered:

"This is a peace party on its way to Montreal, asked to come there by Onontio. I speak for the Five Nations."

The Rat slowly drew back, his dark face simulating disgust and amazement. Anger struggled with incredulity as he demanded—

"Does the Onondaga swear that on the calumet?"

Dekanisora shrugged his shoulders and idly watched the blood trickle from a wound in his arm. At last he replied, saying:

"Perhaps the road of truth is so far from the land of the Hurons that they do not know it when they come to it. The men of Onontio came to the Long House and asked for peace. I carry white belts to Montreal, where Onontio and the Five Nations had agreed to talk their terms into the wampum." And from the bow of a canoe he picked up the bag containing the peace talk. "Already belts have been given and returned at the Great Council House at Onondaga. Only the terms of the peace remain to be fixed."

"I hear your words but they make me think I am dreaming bad dreams," protested the Rat, his bearing displaying an

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amazing degree of histrionic ability, alternately revealing horror, incredulity and wrath. "Onontio tells us to find you here and knock you in the head."

"Onontio has begged the Iroquois to bring belts showing a smooth road from the Long House to Montreal," bitterly replied Dekanisora.

"Do the belts show a smooth road from the Long House to Michilimackinac?"

"They show but one road—to Montreal," was the ominous answer.

The Rat exploded in an arraignment of Denonville. Striking the bonds from all his prisoners, except one, he hoarsely cried:

"Go back to your people, Iroquois. You are free. I shall never rest till your league takes vengeance on Onontio for the evil trick he has played me and my Hurons. The Hurons are warriors and do not fight the bearers of white belts. Onontio has tricked me into doing an evil thing. You have killed one of my warriors. I shall keep one of yours to adopt into my tribe in place of the dead."

Yancey paid the Huron homage for his astuteness. It was a master-stroke of finesse, and left both parties to the incomplete peace outgeneraled. With admiration he watched the Rat dress the wounds of the envoys and escort them to the forest.

"—— me! But he's clever," muttered the ranger as the Iroquois filed into the woods, making overland to report the "treachery" of Denonville. Then approaching the Rat he boldly demanded his freedom.

The Rat shook his head and said:

"Not yet, Englishman, unless we first cut out your tongue; for you know too much. You will come with the Hurons, but shall not be harmed."

Facing about to the forest he raised his war-ax above his head, and shouted:

"Great is the Rat! He has killed the peace."

WITH impatience to return to the Hudson the ranger finished the journey to Michilimackinac, and immediately witnessed further evidence of the Rat's master cunning. He stripped Yancey of his garb, painted him like a Huron and detailed two warriors to kill him if he attempted to communicate with the French. Next he handed the Iroquois over to the commandant, but said nothing about the proposed peace, or as to what had happened at La Famine. The Iroquois promptly recited the attack on the peace party, and the puzzled commandant sent for the Rat.

The latter denied all the Iroquois had said, and suggested the prisoner had invented the story in hope it might save him from death. Suspecting nothing of Denonville's latest scheme for peace the commandant promptly ordered his soldiers to shoot the Iroquois. Another Iroquois, long held prisoner by the Hurons, had been brought in from one of the back villages to behold the death of his countryman. Taking him aside the Rat sorrowfully said:

"Iroquois, the French have killed your brother. It is not safe for you to stay with us. The French are wolves and will kill you. Go home to your people and tell them the Hurons have dropped the chain that bound them to the French."

SIX MONTHS later Yancey arrived at Albany and learned how the Rat's ruse had succeeded. In spite of Denonville's frantic efforts to set himself right the Five Nations believed he had planned treachery at La Famine. They made no hostile demonstration, but came to Albany and disclaimed any thought of breaking their friendship with Corlaer. The Western tribes made much medicine that the misunderstanding might continue and keep Canada interposed between them and the Long House.

Yancey made his belated report to Governor Andros and warned him that the Iroquois were biding their time to strike the French. Andros ordered the five tribes not to attack the French, and it was believed his commands had had the desired effect. The Winter passed without an attack. Montreal breathed more freely and the outlying settlements planted their crops. The corn came up and the strawberries ripened.

"Andros got our Injuns pretty well tamed," Yancey was deciding, when, with the incisiveness of a bolt of lightning fifteen hundred Iroquois struck La Chine, six miles from Montreal, and perpetrated the worst massacre Canada ever had suffered.

When the direful tidings filtered down the Hudson the ranger shuddered, and exclaimed:

"Nothing but bullets can tame the Iroquois. For once in his life the Rat spoke the truth, when he said he'd killed the peace."

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THE CAMP-FIRE

A Meeting-Place for Readers Writers and Adventurers

BEARING on his story in this issue George Warburton Lewis gives us some interesting reading:

The three principal characters in the tale, *Tankersley*, the *Greaser Captain*, and *Nicholson*, are anything but figments of the imagination. Two of them probably will read the story. The third can not read (how fortunately), and even if he could, the story would not necessarily mean anything to him, for as a matter of fact the half-breed Captain was not a ship captain at all. In real life he commanded many and divers kinds of men, however, and from a long close-range study of him I can not doubt that, had he been the skipper of the *Pez Volador* (Flying Fish), he would have been much the same type of despot as the commander of the pest-ship.

OUTSIDE of fiction the *Greaser Captain* was a bully, but a bully without fear; and though a dangerous enemy, he was ever loath to fight fair. Once, two days after an altercation with one of his men, he treacherously struck the latter from behind with a pick-handle, and while the poor fellow writhed unconscious on the ground the Captain laughed at the wild chorus of threats and cries of protest that came from his victim's two hundred fellow workers. The Captain was of that distinctive type of outlaw that, once seen, sticks in one's memory.

NICHOLSON, in every-day life, was pretty much what he is in "Devious Are the Ways"—an average wandering Englishman, one of those fascinating vagabonds of nature whose stories you can listen to untiringly for hours at a stretch, day after day and week after week. *Nicholson* had, as he modestly expressed it, "knocked about a bit." When chance threw us together in one of the wayside places of the world he was the chief steward of the Canal Commission's hotel at Porto Bello, the historical Panamá stronghold so long ago sacked by a countryman of *Nicholson's*, Morgan, the buccaneer.

I had eventuated into the command of the Zone Police at Porto Bello, and *Nicholson* and I, having much in common officially, used to take our meals at a table apart after "the fellows who did the work" had finished. The awful aloofness of such places fosters mutual understanding and friendliness. I have found that the farther men are from the centers of civilization the closer they are brought together by the bonds of companionship. The intimate friendships of Broadway afford no such glimpses into human souls as do the solitudes of the waste places. *Nicholson* and I became friends, and it was from a yarn he told me over a third cup of coffee at one of our long-drawn-out luncheons one day that I evolved the framework of the present story. Quite in the same way, it was because of the unforgettable impression made upon me by the tramping dreamer himself that I worked him into the cast.

IN LOOKING over a carbon copy of this yarn, I felt not a little grouchy at having been unable fittingly to portray *Tankersley* as he was and is. I wish the readers of *Adventure* could know him. I had heard of men who could adapt themselves to all phases and conditions of life, but my skepticism as to their actual existence was never removed until, once upon a time, some whim of fortune side-tracked me into a job as second in command of the guard and secret service at one of our great American expositions. With a not unnatural curiosity as to the sort of personnel I should have to work with, I began gradually to widen my circle of vision over the tented expanse of the semi-military police camp, and then, all of a sudden—there stood *Tankersley*.

Between two wall-tents (at nine o'clock in the morning and on a work day!) dousing his head with basinfuls of cold water, I beheld for the first time the hero-to-be of "Devious Are the Ways." Not altogether a conventional introduction of a fiction hero, you may think, yet if you knew the man better you might think otherwise. He was only doing now the first of many unexpected things which were destined thereafter to establish him in short fiction.

"What's that for?" I queried, as he continued sloshing the water over his head, unmindful of my presence.

He paused, squinted out at me through the dripping flood, set the basin on the ground and slowly straightened. "For last night's indiscretion, Captain," and he smiled painfully, as though it might be his last.

I FROWNED, and as he rubbed his head gently with a towel, *Tankersley* gazed at me in calm contemplation out of wide, sky-blue eyes. He was a little under medium height and rather thin, though he looked hard and wiry. A column of dim freckles straggled like a routed army across the long high bridge of his prominent nose. He was lean of jaw and sunburned—and that was all. All, yet not all. Somewhere in the depths of the abnormally large, sky-blue eyes, barely perceptible, there was a merry twinkle, a half-hidden laugh.

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"You see," he was explaining, "the chief detailed me last night to shadow a 'con' man, and getting drunk with him was all in the day's work. I finally got my man pretty well under way, all right, but by the time I had got him that far along I was unable myself to keep a very accurate record of his movements. I am quite clear, however, as to one important fact, and that is that he brought me home!"

That's how I came up with him, Detective *Tankersley;* one of the keenest analysts I have ever seen. Before breaking into secret service work he was a soldier in the Philippines. He was just good enough and just bad enough to be a very natural, human adventurer. When he reads this in his office in far-off California I hope it will remind him that he owes me a letter.—GEORGE WARBURTON LEWIS.

ROBERT V. CARR first brought Wild Hickok into *Adventure's* pages some year's ago in an article on Wild Bill's death. From another of our Camp-Fire comrades, E. A. Brininstool, whose special interest for years in frontier matters has made him an authority, comes to us the following:

Los Angeles.

I have received through *Adventure* a letter from a party who signs himself "The Ace," requesting some information regarding a noted frontier character known as "Wild Bill" Hickok.

THE real name of Wild Bill was James Butler Hickok, and he was born in May, 1837, in La Salle County, Illinois. He was eighteen years of age when he first saw the West as a fighting man under Jim Lane of Free Soil fame, in the guerrilla days of Kansas, prior to the Civil War.

Before Wild Bill was twenty years of age he had made his mark, and was elected a constable in that dangerous locality. Later he developed into one of the most splendidly-physiqued men that ever trod the Western soil. Bill was not a quarrelsome man, altough he was a mighty dangerous one when aroused. His voice was low and even. But it was with the six-shooter that Bill shone, and perhaps no man on the frontier has ever surpassed him in quick and accurate shooting with the heavy "six-gun." The tale of his killings in single combat is the longest authentically assigned to any man in American history.

IT WOULD require too much of Camp-Fire's space to recount Wild Bill's many encounters. Probably his most noted fight was on the afternoon of December 16, 1861, when he was station agent at Rock Creek station, about fifty miles west of Topeka, Kan., one of the stops of the Overland stage route. Two border outlaws by the name of McCandlas (brothers) led a gang of notorious ruffians and tried to induce Wild Bill to join them. They wanted to run off the horses belonging to the stage company, and Bill told them to "come ahead and try it."

They came—ten of them—on the date above named. Bill was alone, his stableman being away on a hunt. He retreated to his dugout and got ready for the gang. His weapons were a rifle, two six-shooters and a knife.

TO MAKE a long story short, the gang battered in the door and attacked Wild Bill. He killed the first man inside with his rifle. Bill then grabbed up the six-shooters—with which he was as dexterous with one hand as with the other—and in three quick shots killed three more of the gang as they rushed in. In the smoky dugout Bill found he could not get a view of his assailants, so he dropped his revolvers and grabbed up his knife, with which he "waded in." There were six men to finish, and Bill proceeded to do it with neatness and dispatch, cutting, slashing, thrusting and parrying. To use his own words, "I just got sort o' wild. I thought my heart was on fire. I was cut and shot all to pieces myself."

They called him "Wild Bill" after that encounter. Two of the gang escaped when Bill fainted from loss of blood, but he had killed eight of them. There is no record of any fighting man to equal this. It took Bill a year to recover from his wounds.

BILL was successively marshal of Hayes City, Abilene and other tough frontier towns. Up to this time, according to some records, Bill had killed something like seventy-two men. I merely give the figures as stated by a well-known writer on Western frontier life.

Wild Bill took a fling at theatricals, but he was not a success on the stage, like Buffalo Bill. He says himself that he "got plumb scared" when before the footlights. When he saw what was expected of him he quit and went back to his beloved West.

I COULD enumerate scores of Wild Bill's fights with bad men on the border, but this is not the time nor place. His death occurred on August 2, 1876, at Deadwood, South Dakota, under the following circumstances:

Bill had won some money in a poker game from a hard citizen of Deadwood named Jack McCall, early in the day of August second. Later, as he was playing cards with some other men in a saloon, McCall slipped up behind him, placed a gun at the back of his head and shot him dead, before Bill knew an enemy was near. McCall was later arrested at Yankton, tried before a real court, convicted and promptly hanged.

WILD BILL'S body was buried at Deadwood, and "Calamity Jane," the noted frontier woman, lies by his side, as it was her request to be buried thus. Hickok was thirty-nine years old when killed, and it is said that he had averaged a little more than two men for each year of his life. He was well known among Army officers, and esteemed as a scout, being never regarded as a "tough man" in any sense. He was a man of wonderful personal beauty, being over six feet in height, and it is said that he had a waist as slim as a woman's and a hand and foot of the same feminine daintiness. Of him General George Custer said: "He was a plainsman in every sense of the word, yet unlike any other of his class. Whether on foot or horseback he was one of the most perfect types of physical manhood I ever saw. His manner was entirely free from all bluster and bravado. He never spoke of himself unless requested to do so. His influence among frontiersmen was unbounded; his word was law. Wild Bill was anything but a

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quarrelsome man, yet none but himself could enumerate the many conflicts in which he had engaged."

WILD BILL had killed a great many Indians at different times, but of these no estimate is accurate. Cutting out all doubtful instances, however, there remains no doubt that he had killed between twenty and thirty men in personal combat in the open, and that he was never once tried in any court, on a charge even of manslaughter.—E. A. BRININSTOOL.

JOINING our writers' brigade with his first story in *Adventure*, H. A. Noureddin Addis follows Camp-Fire custom and introduces himself:

Southeastern Ohio, the region of the early Ohio oil-fields, is the district that furnished me a birthplace. My earliest recollection is of an oil-well, and as a boy my first employment was in the oil-fields. My paternal grandfather followed the oil industry from Pennsylvania to Ohio when the first strike was made in the one-time famous Macksburg district, finally dying in that village at a fairly advanced age in 1909. There my father was born a few years after my grandfather's arrival, and in due course, myself.

OF ANOTHER strain my great-great-grandfather was one of the original Ohio settlers at Marietta in 1788-1789. His elder son was one of the engineers who surveyed the Ohio Company's Purchase. And his younger son, my great-grandfather, was born in the block-house at Marietta in 1794, being the first male child of white parentage born in the State. (At any rate if he had predecessors, history is silent on the subject.)

These things, and the fact that some of the early statesmen of Ohio were my near collateral relatives, together with the fact that the district where I was born was teeming with romantic historical landmarks of the State's early days, have given me a feeling toward my native State that is rather out of place in this country since the Civil War, but I have always felt that I was first an Ohioan. Yet, I am now a citizen of California.

I HAVE traveled some in most of the European countries, especially the Balkans; also Asia Minor. Those countries are rich in fiction possibilities, and constitute another rather extensive field of my literary endeavors. The eternal mystery and romance of the Orient are there; that is, to one who wishes to see it. To many, those countries are even duller and more sordid than the rest of the world. Of course in reality we're much the same the world over, and Ali ibn Youssouf, Hagop Krikorian, or Mirza Hassan Ali Isfahani, are virtually what John Smith would have been if brought up in the same environment. As proof I may say that I know Turks of whom the father and mother were English, born in England, who in adult life, being converted to Islam, have gone to Turkey, and their children are indistinguishable from any other Turks. In fact, in many instances it is almost impossible to distinguish the people of the older generation, who have themselves emigrated.

OF COURSE the English and Turkish temperaments are practically identical. Both are inclined to stolidity, impassivity. Both are essentially romantic, but would perish rather than knowingly allow an outsider to guess it. Being rather a Celt myself I haven't perhaps sufficient patience with these solemn humbugs, but rather prefer the Arab temperament which is perhaps the nearest analogy to the Celt that the Orient affords. While the Persian will, in my opinion, correspond more nearly with the Latin—philologists who connect Iran with Erin to the contrary notwithstanding. However, the Persian is not wholly Latin; he is the Latin tempered with blood of Celt and Teuton—the Frenchman of the Orient.

Yet I do not wish to be understood as depreciating the many solid virtues of the cool, hard-headed races. In their way they have contributed as much to the progress of the world as the others who enjoy an occasional laugh at them for taking themselves so seriously. Very possibly their contributions are of a more essential and enduring character than those made by the more brilliantly temperamental races.

AS FOR personal adventures, I have never had any that were startling. On the other hand, my entire life has been to a great extent an adventure—although for the most part prosaic enough. My nearest approach to real adventure took place some few years ago when I was closely associated with some of the leaders of a revolutionary party in an Oriental country. But as to go deeply into this would necessarily reveal certain secrets which, in the interests of others whose present political positions might not be improved by such revelation, I feel that I should not disclose.

Much of the romance and adventure in life rests with the mental make-up of the beholder. The point of view is everything. To some adventure is everywhere, to others, nowhere. One sees adventure in situations where another discerns nothing but the most casual of every-day affairs. Perhaps after all the whole difference in individuals is a questions of self-analysis, an ability to recognize and mentally catalog impressions. But this leads into deeper water, and I am neither psychologist nor metaphysician.—H. A. NOUREDDIN ADDIS.

A WORD from Harold A. Lamb on his story in this issue:

The germ of *Dorgan's Devil-Devil* came from an experience of an uncle who commanded a ship on the China station, and visited the Samoa and Fiji Islands. After one of these trips he brought home a collection of shark-tooth swords and curious tales of the South-Sea Islands. The next time he came home he was brought by his men, having died of sickness on the China station. Naturally, the islands offered many a tale to me of the Service.

In my opinion justice is seldom done to one of the finest types of adventuring men—the officers of the United States Navy. This is probably because the writers and public are not in touch with them, except in war-time. Newspaper men see a good deal of the Service, but their write-ups are confined to items of news value. Too much can't be

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said in stories or newsprint of the men who do their work outside the bounds of publicity with indomitable pluck, for the increase of efficiency in the Service. Just tribute is paid the English naval officer, but the best tribute I have ever heard paid the American officer—not in war-time—has been from Englishmen who have followed closely the work of the American Navy.—HAROLD A. LAMB.

IN OUR mid-February issue was the first call for the names of those Americans who are ready to unite for a more logically developed and fully applied democracy in the United States, for cleanness in public office and for the definite and systematic teaching of fundamental good citizenship. In that issue and the one following was given a creed or platform designed at least to outline the principles and work involved.

The ground could not, of course, be more than outlined in that small space. There was no attempt or desire to do more. The purpose was merely to get the names of those Americans who are ready to join a definite, comprehensive movement for the purposes named above, *if* that movement, when fully explained, meets with their approval. These names are not for publication and the sending of them involves no obligation.

AS ALREADY pointed out, no one is wanted for this movement who is not ready for hard, thankless work without other reward than the attainment of good ends for the people at large. There will be no "glory" in it; only dull, drab work day after day, work that would take, if all did their parts, no more time than every citizen owes to his nation, but, since many shirk, work that must fall on the shoulders of the comparative few willing to do extra duty until the shirking citizens can be taught to begin carrying their shares of the common civic burden. Men and women of all classes and degrees are wanted, but none except those ready and eager to carry more than their share.

The plan to be offered is not a magic cure-all. There are as yet no definite organization, no nationally known sponsors, no financial backing. But there is a very definitely worked-out plan of campaign, the result of some ten years' slow and careful labor. I believe very firmly, of course, in this plan of mine, but, equally of course, no one is asked to endorse it in advance.

I AM deliberately stating the case in discouraging form. I want all those who are easily discouraged to be eliminated at the start. Those of you who have read either of the former outlines of general aims are sufficiently informed at least to know whether or not you are in sympathy with the general purpose. Your name is wanted only if you are sufficiently in sympathy to want to know the plan in detail and, if it meets with your approval, to join in the movement earnestly and permanently.

It is not yet decided how the details will be put in your hands. I have embodied the plan in a book, but the book has not even been offered to a publisher. No, this is not a campaign for selling my book, but I'll try to convince you of that by deeds, not words. If you can see only a book-selling campaign in this, your recourse is a simple one—have nothing to do with it.

IF YOU send in your name you may not even get an acknowledgement. But your name will be carefully filed. For the present there will be no fuller statement in this magazine. I am writing this in December. The first announcement and call for names appears in our mid-February issue, which will be in your hands a month before you read this, but not until a month after I write this. The first names sent in can not reach me until the latter part of January; any names in reply to the second call, not until February. Until February, then, I shall not know how many names will come in, so until February there seems no need to go into further detail. That means that there will be little or nothing more on the subject in this magazine until the mid-May or possibly the first-May issue.

In the meantime there is work to be done in preparing the ways for the definite organization that will follow.

FOLLOWING our Camp-Fire custom, Edward Bellamy Partridge stands up and introduces himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine:

My first adventure was sprung on me at Phelps, New York, on the 10th day of July, 1877. I don't remember much about the occasion except that my father said, "Another boy, eh? That means one more straight Republican vote."

THE next important adventure occurred at Lyons, New York, on the 13th day of October, 1903, when I dropped the wedding-ring on the floor and said "I do" in the wrong place until the minister

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became so confused that he said "A-men" instead of "Ah-men."

And in the meantime I had spent two years in a "prep" school in Norwalk, Connecticut, two more in Hobart College, and had then gone to the Albany Law School where I was awarded the honor of writing the letters, "LL.B." after my name. I had also lost cases for some of the best people in Ontario County, and won them for some of the worst.

FOR ten years I followed the law, writing intermittently, and hoping that some day I might be able to do it all the time. Then along came an attack of typhoid fever from which I was a long time recovering—and it was during the period of my convalescence at Atlantic City that I first learned of the charms of southern California life.

A few months later I sold out my practise, packed up the household gods and shipped them to San Diego (gods is what I meant to say), gathered together my wife and my faithful friend Fiji (a brindle gentleman from Boston), and, taking along two other friends for company, clambered into the family automobile and set sail for the Pacific Coast.

We pursued a westerly direction following the general course of the Lincoln Highway (although there wasn't any such thing in 1912) and after two months of leisurely travel—some of it not so leisurely and very hard walking—we reached our destination, sunburned and travel-stained, but happy and very much corrected in our ideas of geography and topography.

WE ALWAYS managed to sleep under cover except once when a sprained axle compelled us to spend the night in a lonely Wyoming ditch far from human habitation. During the night the ground squirrels ran over the top of the car, jackrabbits sniffed at the tires, and a coyote came near enough to eat the scraps of lunch which we had thrown away and for which we devoutly wished the next morning when one of the party was compelled to set out on a ten-mile "hike" with an empty stomach.

But a ranch was found not more than five miles away where the axle was straightened with the assistance of a forge and a giant cowpuncher who used the hub of an old wagon-wheel for a sledge-hammer.

EVERY day brought forth adventures of one sort or another. If we weren't being mired in an alkali bog we were running away from a sand-storm or sliding down a hill so steep that we kept right on going with the wheels locked.

On one occasion we ran twenty-five miles over rough mountain roads in the dead of night with no light except that of our tail-lamp which we had wired to one of the headlight brackets; and, when we chanced to plunge into a deep ford through which the road ran, we all thought our last moment had come. A little farther on I drove so close to a washed place in the road that I knocked down the danger signal. But we finally reached a town safe and sound and on all four tires—although one of them was flat.

LAST Spring I made several trips through the Mojave Desert with a party of miners, where I made the acquaintance of the taciturn sidewinder, and learned how to bathe, cook, shave, wash dishes and keep alive all on a pint of water a day.

After settling down to live in California I was not long in demonstrating to myself and several other people that I was not cut out for a successful real-estate operator. So I set to work to make a writer of myself—and I am still at it.

I think the most thrilling moment of my life was that at which I received the first letter telling of the acceptance of a story. And a moment that was a close second was that when I learned of the acceptance of my first book, "Sube Cane."

My motor wanderings which have, in addition to the trans-continental tour, carried me from Canada to Mexico and all through most of the Eastern States as well as on several camping-motoring trips through the West, are being gradually worked into the form of a book which I hope may be of interest to all lovers of the bark of a motor and the uncertainty about what is going to happen next.

SOME months ago a little coastwise steamer was wrecked off the Coronado Islands near this port (San Diego). In trying to launch their lifeboats the crew had lost all but one boat which they lashed to the after deck, and in which they were sitting as they waited for the end, when a giant sea swept over the vessel and launched their boat for them. They made the shore in safety. And that part of "Rags" having to do with the shipwreck was based on the stories told by several of the survivors with whom I talked.

The diving-bell episode of the story came to me after seeing a local amateur diver remain over half an hour under thirty feet of water with an old soup-kettle over his head which was furnished with fresh air by a "Mex" on the dock who wielded a tire-pump.

INFORMATION as to the smuggling of the China-boys was gleaned from the Federal officers at this place who are in constant warfare with smugglers who receive so much a head for delivering a Chinaman on American soil. Several times Chinamen have been seen by picnickers, skulking about these islands which are uninhabited, and stories are told of how they have more than once been brought in by unsuspecting excursionists who have taken them for stranded fishermen or something of that sort.

Rags is a real dog. He lives not far from me. And while I do not know that he has done all the things he has received credit for, I know that he would do them if he ever had a chance.—EDWARD BELLAMY PARTRIDGE.

A LITTLE story passed on to us by D. Wiggins of Salem, Oregon, a tale recalled to memory by an old settler when he saw one of our covers, the old Kit Carson pioneer with his long squirrel rifle:

Salem, Ore.

I showed the picture of the old pioneer with his Deckard smoking to Uncle John McDonough, a neighbor of ours. You see, Uncle John is a direct descendent of Adam Poe, of the Ohio Valley in the days when to live there took as much hardihood as it takes to be a—well, a grocer and quote present-day prices to customers. Uncle is seventy-eight years young, and can beat ye scribe shooting with his long Kentucky rifle. He's done it.

"By ——," ejaculated Uncle John, on beholding

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the cover, "that is just like I see old Injun Dave Sitler look; I knowed him in Ioway in the fifties." (You see, uncle was a frontiersman.)

HE then told me the following story: Sitler was a noted shot in the settlements where Fort Dodge, Iowa, stands now. There was in the vicinity an Indian, what tribe uncle did not state, who was a distinctly bad actor. And instead of scalps he boasted of having a string of ninety-nine human tongues. Why he preferred them to scalps I do not know.

At any rate, he was so ill-advised as to say on a certain occasion that he wanted one more tongue on that string, and that was the one of Sitler's mother. Dave heard of the boast, but bided his time. The country was so settled that the killing of the lustful one was not to be done in the usual fashion.

But at last the opportunity came. Dave, while scouting around on the banks of a little stream, came upon his man sitting on a log that extended into the stream, fishing. In telling of the affair he said:

"I just raised old Betty up and looked at him over the sights a spell, and thought how easy it would be to drill him. And pretty soon he fell off the log and drownded hisself. He never got my mammy's tongue."

"And," added Uncle John, "I reckon he told the truth; we found the Injun's gun on the bank by the foot of the log." He considers it a great joke.

WOULD we could serve some hyphenated citizens likewise; and some who are the native stuff also. We have very few of them here—have too many people here who are of uncontrollable tempers and ready fists. A German who insulted the flag on the Fourth was knocked down and joyfully walked upon by an unknown stranger. He is a model of loyalty since.—D. WIGGINS.

LETTER-FRIENDS BACK HOME

A Free Service Department for American, Canadian, and Other Allied Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and Others in Camp or at the Front.

Any one in the United States or Allied service who wishes to brighten the time with letters from "back home," or wherever else this magazine circulates, and with the personal touch and interest of hitherto unknown friends, can secure these letters and these friends by sending us his name and military address to be published once in this department as soon as censorship of soldiers' foreign addresses permits. In the meantime his address can be printed as "care *Adventure*," letters to be forwarded at once by us to the military address he gives us in confidence. Among our readers of both sexes, all classes and from all parts of the world, he is likely to gain a number of friendly, personal correspondents. He is free to answer only such as he is comfortably able to answer under the conditions that surround him, and it is even suggested that the number of correspondents for any one man be determined by the needs of his comrades as well as by his own.

This magazine, of course, assumes no responsibility other than the publishing of these names and addresses as its space will permit. Experience has shown that the service offered is a very real and needed one, and all not themselves in service are asked to do their part in making the daily life of those fighting in our defense brighter and pleasanter through personal friendships across the intervening miles and by whatever personal, human kindnesses such friendships may suggest.

When giving your military address make it as permanent a one as possible.

(As the magazine is made up several months in advance, the above notice will appear with only such stray names as happen to come in to us until there has been time for it to reach the camps and the front and for names and addresses to reach us, be put in type and then reach our readers on publication.)

PVT. C. F. WHITELEY, care *Adventure*.

WE'VE all learned a good deal about the marvelous running powers of Indians since the Camp-Fire took up the discussion a year or two ago. Here is a further interesting addition from Samuel L. Fegtly, Department of Law, University of Arizona:

Tucson, Arizona.

Last Saturday evening I attended an illustrated lecture by Dr. George Wharton James, noted writer, lecturer and student of our American Indians, on the Hopi Snake Dance.

DURING the course of the lecture Dr. James threw upon the screen a picture of an aged Indian who, Dr. James said, was personally known to him and was over seventy years old at the time the picture was taken. The day before the picture was taken this old man had run over the desert forty miles to his cornfield, worked there during the day (how many hours Dr. James did not say) and then ran back to his village at night. The day after this (the day the picture was taken, as I understood) he was on his way to a patch of timber twenty-seven miles away where he was to cut wood, returning to the village at night.

I remembered the discussion in *Adventure* and thought I would send this in to you to file with the rest of your information in regard to this matter.

DR. JAMES may be known to you, but on the chance that he is not I will add that, so far as I could learn from the people there who know him, he is an Englishman, came to this part of the country a good many years ago in poor health, has traveled over this Southwest extensively, is a "blood-brother" to several Indian tribes (among them the Hopi), has been present at the Snake Dance some dozen or more times, has assisted, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say, has been present at the washing of the snakes and other ceremonies preliminary to the dance, and in other ways has acquired a vast fund of information about these things.—SAMUEL M. FEGTLY.

COPIES of the first issue of *Adventure* are hard to get. Those who have them will not let go of them, and our office supply was exhausted years ago. But here's a comrade who wants one *hard*.

Leonard W. Barkley, Morrisburg, Ontario, Canada, has tried the second-hand dealers, has advertised in our "Back Issues" department, has written me a number of times, has tried in every way, but he can't get hold of a copy of *Adventure* for November, 1910. He has every other copy for over seven years to date and he wants this one. Many others of you have complete files and he isn't asking you to break yours in order to fill out his, but if any one of you has a November, 1910, and is not keeping

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complete files, maybe he'll drop Mr. Barkley a line.

INCIDENTALLY, a few copies of each issue of 1916—except March, which is completely exhausted—have been found in our sub-cellar and can be sold at the regular price. A few of 1915 and 1914 also came to light. At present they are held for possible needs of other departments but will, I think, soon be released for sale.

And *say*—when you write for back issues or about anything concerning subscriptions won't you please, as *Mr. John Wilkes* says, for G-a-w-d's sake write not to me or to the editorial department but to the circulation department? I have no authority in such matters and when you write me about them, all I can do is to send your letter with a memo to the circulation department and then write you a letter saying I have done so. I'm always glad to help when I can, but in this case I don't help any, and, believe me, I have more than plenty of work to do in order to keep my own job going. So far as we can estimate, from 8,000 to 9,000 letters and communications of one kind or another are mailed out from *Adventure's* editorial department every year. Also there are one or two other little chores to be attended to.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

ADVENTURE'S FREE SERVICES AND ADDRESSES

These services of *Adventure* are free to *any one.* They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later we may furnish a metal card or tag. If interested in metal cards, say so on a *post-card—not* in a letter. No obligation entailed. These post-cards, filed, will guide us as to demand and number needed.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

Back Issues of *Adventure*

Will sell: 1915: October, November, December; 1916: January, February, March, October, November, December; 1917, all except August. Any copy 10 cents plus postage.—MORTON H. SPENCER, Route 4, Wellsboro, Pa.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located one out of about every five inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 731 Guardian Bldg., Cleveland, O., in charge of preliminary organizing.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

High-School Volunteers of the U. S.—An organization promoting a democratic system of military training in American high schools. Address *Everybody's*, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Remember

☞ Magazines are made up ahead of time. An item received today is too late for the current issue; allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for Adventure Magazine by our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each month in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable and standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Also temporarily covering South American coast from Valparaiso south around the Cape and up to the River Plate. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea Part 1
S. B. H. HURST, Box 892, Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S. and British Empire; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men, local to the U. S. should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Hurst.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay: river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodscraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs; and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Johnson City, Tenn. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering; sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

8. Western U. S. Part 2
CAPT.-ADJ. JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, Yankton, S. Dak. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri. Hunting, fishing, travel. *Especially*, early history of Missouri Valley.

9. Western U. S. Part 3
Mexico Part 1
J. W. ROBERTSON, 912 W. Lynn Street, Austin, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.

10. Mexico Part 2
J. W. WHITEAKER, Cedar Park, Texas. Covering Central and Southern Mexico below a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. History, geography, customs, government, animals, minerals, products and industries.

11. North American Snow Countries Part 1
ROBERT E. PINKERTON, care of Starbuck Ranch, Morrison, Colorado. Covering Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Manitoba, a strip of Ontario between Minn. and C. P. R'y. Canoes and snow-shoes; methods and materials of Summer and Winter subsistence, shelter and travel, for recreation or business.

12. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 2
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. Covering Southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 4
ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

15. North American Snow Countries Part 5
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipments, clothing, food, physics, hygiene; mountain work.

16. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 397 Monadnock Bldg., San Francisco, Calif.

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Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

17. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, Sayville, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

18. The Balkans
ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH, *Evening Post*, 20 Vesey St., New York City. Covering Rumania, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Turkey (in Europe); travel, sport, customs, language, local conditions, markets, industries.

19. Asia, Southern
GORDON MCCREAGH, care R. J. Neuman, 160 Seaman Ave., Inwood, New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

20. Japan and Korea
ROBERT WELLES RITCHIE, Mountain Lakes, N. J. Covering travel, hunting, customs of people, art and curios.

21. Russia and Eastern Siberia
CAPTAIN A. M. LOCHWITZKY (Formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Quartermaster, U. S. Troops, Mercedes, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalin; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

22. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, 1604 Chapin Ave., Burlingame, Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

23. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Castle View, Meriden, Conn. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, etc.

24. Africa Part 3 ★ Portugese East Africa
R. W. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

25. Africa Part 4 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rodesia, British East Africa, Uganda, and the Upper Congo.
CHARLES BEADLE, care Paul Tausig & Son, 104 E. 14th St., New York, N. Y. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, mining, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport.

26. ★ New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

27. Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, 1106 Van Nuys Building, Los Angeles, Cal. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, H. I. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba. Or J. V. Knight, Director, Republic of Cuba News Bureau, Woolworth Building, New York.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★ *(Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached)*

Gold in Honduras

Question:—"My 'running-mate' and I are contemplating a prospecting trip to headwaters of Segovia River, Honduras, mentioned favorably by you in recent *Adventure*.

"We have both knocked around a bit but have never before hunted for gold. Any advice you may be able to give us in regard to requirements, financial, educational, physical, legal, etc. would be greatly appreciated. ——., Baltimore, Md.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—I am sending you herewith enclosed a short monograph I have prepared on Central America which contains several items of interest to you. Also I have checked off a book or two on my list which you should obtain and read.

The outfit you would require for prospecting for gold is very simple. Your entire camping outfit should be small enough to carry upon your back in addition to a change of light khaki clothing or overalls. About the only tools you would require would be a small sheet-iron pan not tinned or galvanized for testing the sands and gravel. These "gold" pans are sold in almost any Western hardware store. They are similar to a wash-basin but the bottom is flat and there is a sharp angle where the bottom and sides meet. Also, if I were you, I would have some tool-maker or blacksmith make me a small shovel and pick that I could lash on to the outside of my pack. Gold-bearing ores may be crushed by pounding to powder and then "panning" to test their values.

It is all a matter of gravity; gold being heavier than sand, gravel, and the other metals, sinks to the bottom of the pan when water is added and the pan given a quick rotary motion. You may test this by placing small bits of gold no larger than grains of sand in a quantity of earth and separating it in this fashion.

It will cost you very little to finance the undertaking. Write the United Fruit Co., 17 Battery Place, New York, for the price of a ticket on one of their boats. From there to the headwaters of the river depends on how you are going. There are river steamers running part of the way. You can go on these to some upriver point and then either hire a native pit-pan, or dugout, runner or obtain a dugout and paddle it yourself as far as possible and then proceed by foot. By steamer you may go one hundred and ten miles and by pit-pan one hundred and thirty miles more. It is then about sixty miles to the headwaters. At any point along the river a man can sustain life with the aid of a machete in the forest. And if he has a gun, ammunition, a fish-hook and line he can live like a king.

There is a Berlitz language school located at 14 West Franklin St., in your city. Their courses in Spanish are good. I studied French and Portuguese in their schools in Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro. You should know at least a smattering of Spanish before setting out. The Berlitz method is very rapid.

The Segovia River has a multitude of names. For the first fifty miles it is known as the Somoro, after which it takes the names of Cabrugal, Cadrullal, Coco, or Cocos, Yoro, or Yare, Portillo, Liso,

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Tabacac, Encuentro, Pantasma, Segovia, Gracias, or Cape Hervias, and at its very mouth Yanks, or Wanks. It is 483 kilometers long.

Geologically, Eastern Nicaragua is similar to Nevada, both being a lava formation known as andite, a grayish, more or less muddy-looking lava rock. It is claimed that the geological age of the two countries is the same, yet the surface presents a widely different appearance, Nevada being sandy and barren and Eastern Nicaragua covered with calico clay and heavy tropical growth. This latter condition makes the work of prospecting more arduous than in Nevada. Andite rock is a formation which contains the greater portion of the gold deposits of the world, and some of the greatest known deposits have been unearthed in precisely the same formation as that in Nicaragua and the same geological age. No great bonanzas have yet been unearthed in Nicaragua, or Honduras, although single Indians have saved, using a crude wooden bowl, over a pint of gold a day in some of the earlier placers, but mark this down: *it's there.* "High boot" men will agree when told of the formation and practical men will say so when they look it over.

And I think that soon we will see a rush up either the Patuca or Segovia Rivers. Just where this point will be I do not know. I wish I did know. I was in there and did not locate it. A thousand more may go in and come out but some day some one will stumble upon the biggest strike of them all.

Prospecting is a tedious game. It's like looking for a needle in a haystack. It's rainbow chasing of the worst sort. If you have the time and nothing better to do it is all right. There is nothing sure in it. You might go in there and stay a year and not make your salt. If you arranged right though you could manage to make money out of your trip. Here's a few suggestions: furs, skins, saps, barks, herbs, roots, gums, orchids, photographs, feathers, trading, etc., etc.

Also it might be well to read up on precious stones. Somewhere between Muzo, Colombia, and the Rio Grande River are the lost emerald mines from which the ancient Indians obtained their vast stores of these gems which were stolen by the Spaniards. The thing to do, if you do go in there, is to have an eye peeled for everything. A man searching only for gold in Eastern Nicaragua is like a centipede traveling on one leg. Do you get me?

Camping in the Maine Woods

Question:—"What would be the ideal place in the Maine Woods for two young men to camp from early Spring to late Fall, for benefit of health and experience?

"Could tent, canoe, and other supplies be purchased in some town near starting point? Would it be advisable to hire a guide to set you up the first week?

"What would be approximately the cost of such a trip for Summer and Fall including outfit and supplies for two? Also cost of land, or if on State land are rules like our Adirondacks? What would your personal opinion be of such a trip for two young men twenty and twenty-two?"—ROBERT A. NELSON, Auburn, N. Y.

Answer, by Dr. Hathorne:—There are many ideal places in Maine where two young men could have a most enjoyable time from early Spring to late Fall, but I will speak only of those I am most familiar with; that is, the country north of Moosehead Lake. That in my estimation meets all the requirements: plenty of fish and game, ideal spots to camp, plenty of good spring water, etc.

I will mention one spot in particular, Allegash Lake. I spent two months there this Summer and it certainly is a beautiful lake, not large, about three miles in length, and about the same in width; clean shores, with a number of fine sandy beaches; plenty of trout, togue, and whitefish, and one of the best game regions in the State.

You can buy all necessary camping supplies at Northeast Carry, where the trip starts in.

I should say that your entire outfit, tent, canoe, blankets, outside of fishing-tackle and firearms, would not cost over seventy-five dollars. The food question is hard to estimate, but probably not much, if any more, than it would cost to live at home.

For fishing-tackle a couple of rods, one for trolling and one for fly-fishing, a rifle (I am partial to a 30 caliber), a twelve-gage shotgun, with shells for duck and partridge. I would advise sending to the Commissioners of Inland Fish and Game, Augusta, Maine, for a copy of the fish and game laws of the State.

It would be necessary for you to have a guide, unless you took out a non-resident guide's license, for no non-resident can camp and build fires on wild land for hunting or fishing unless accompanied by a registered guide. It would cost you nothing for a camping spot.

You would require a license to fish, cost two dollars and fifteen cents, and a hunting license that would cost fifteen dollars.

I would estimate the food expenses, from my own experience, about fifty cents per day for each person.

My personal opinion of such a trip can be expressed in one word, "Great!" Read Dr. Breck's "The Way of the Woods." This is a practical book of woodcraft, by one who has been there.

The Guianas

Question:—"Can you give me any information in regard to language, nationality, and advancement of the people of British, French and Dutch Guiana, South America?

"Are there opportunities there for young men of college education and of grammar-school education?"—CORNEL VANDER MEER, Ione, Wash.

Answer, by Captain Dingle:—In each of the Guianas there are, of course, two, or even three, types of people, and each has its own language and grade of advancement. In British Guiana the whites speak English and are as advanced as any other white people, coming as they do mostly from England or other parts of the British Empire. The negroes are as other negroes and speak the usual chopped-up language of their white fellows. The other class may be said to contain the native Indians and the mixed breeds, except that the Indian speaks his own tongue, and the mixed uses a rather worse pidgin than the blacks.

Substituting Dutch and French for British or English, the above applies equally to Dutch and French Guiana. In all these countries there is a good opening for a man of energy and initiative, with capital, or at least sufficient funds to support him for a year of prospecting. In British Guiana

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there are big gold deposits in the hinterland; but it requires good outfits, and *much grit* to get at it or get it out. The same applies to both the other Guianas; in Dutch territory ninety-five per cent. of the total exports consist of gold.

In all these places great numbers of Hindu coolies have been established, constituting the bulk of the available labor. In French Guiana nearly all the old industries have gone back; sugar is negligible, but guano, rosewood, and a little cocoa and coffee remain. No great chances there.

In Dutch Guiana coffee and cocoa are also grown, and gutta percha and timber form the bulk of the other industries. As in French Guiana the openings are small, unless the seeker has personal connections with some planter or merchant in the country.

British Guiana holds many more openings, though here, too, the colonials pretty much handle the situation. In either place the same applies that openings are scarce for the newcomer without personal connections or first-class letters of recommendation. The settled part of British territory is only one-tenth of the entire area, and it easily follows that the sort of man they welcome most heartily is the man who can open up and develop some of the remainder. Sugar, gold, coffee, bananas, timber, gutta percha and rice are the chief commodities raised or produced at present; diamonds too are found, and the land is very rich. It will be an El Dorado for some man one day, but frankly I don't think the lone-handed pioneer will make much of a splurge there. You might better turn to Argentina or Uruguay.

The Muskoka Country

Question:—"Would like to know about the Muskoka Country south of Lake Nipissing.

"1—How about furs? (a) Kind? (b) Approximate number? Would trapping pay?

"2—Hunting?

"3—Fishing?

"4—Inhabitants? Are there many trappers in this district? Many Indians?

"5—Climate? Understand that it gets cold but the air is dry. Right?

"There are two of us and have between five and six hundred dollars beside equipment. Could we get along for about a year?" ——, Youngstown, Ohio.

Answer, by Mr. Catton:—The fishing in the tributaries to, in all the waters south to one hundred and fifty miles of, and in Lake Nipissing itself is the best in Ontario, and some of the best in the world. There are all the Bass family: small and large-mouthed black, green, white, speckled, rock, etc.; all the Trout family: Salmon, cutthroat, rainbow, gray, etc.; Great Northern pike, pike-perch, pickerel, dore, sturgeon, maskinonge, and down to the tiny bull-head or catfish. And you've got to hide behind a tree to bait your hook in lots of places!

The hunting is only fair. There are yet a few moose, bear, and wolves, and quite a number of deer.

The climate is, as you think, cold; the mercury falling occasionally as low as forty-five or even fifty-five below zero. The average temperature for January, February, March would be about zero or a few degrees either way. But it's a dry, bracing cold that is easily faced if your clothing is adequate. The inhabitants while few, are mostly whites; small farmers mostly, and hospitable if you realize and appreciate the conditions they have to contend with. There are quite a number of small remnants of Indians scattered through the district. Indians and breeds who are characteristically much the same as the redskin of the U. S. A.

There is only one place left here where trapping would be profitable: the immediate vicinity of Algonquin Park; and that is infested with trappers every Winter. There are yet a few remnants of the old fur-bearing hordes, an odd otter, beaver, mink, weasel, and lots of muskrats and skunk, even as far south as Gravenhurst, but they are chased to death by the residents all the time. Certainly trapping would be unprofitable here. And there are lots of far richer fields that are almost as easily reached. Would advise you to obtain a Canadian Pacific Railroad map of the Rocky Mountains and pick out one of the spots marked "Big Game." You'll find that the best fishing and hunting obtains there, and as far as trapping is concerned, it is almost a virgin field. Your stake of five or six hundred with equipment would be ample for a year if you make use of natural resources as much as possible and don't spend for luxuries. Get a copy of "Camp Cookery," by Horace Kephart, and follow it when you grub-stake. You'll save money in buying and weight in your dunnage.

Employment in India

Question:—"My wife and I have very recently been offered a job in India. I have soldiered there myself in both Quetta and Bareilly, as well as the country you are fond of choosing as your background, namely, Burma. I have never been in India as a civilian and I should take it as a very great favor if you would kindly tell me the following:

"What can a man and wife live on comfortably in the towns of Karachi, Sindh, Amritzar, Punjab, and Cawnpore, N. W. P.?

The fact is, I have been offered a job in the hide business in India, and the company has a man at Amritzar with whom they have an idea of placing me to learn something of the business. At the same time, they don't care about sending a man and his wife to India without first finding out the minimum living wage for a man and wife in the towns I have mentioned. My experience there as a soldier helps me none. I have little or no idea as to the incomes of the civilian population there, or how much it costs them to live, and put by for a rainy day."—PHIL HOLLOWAY, Boston, Mass.

Answer, by Mr. McCreagh:—Greeting to one of the "Boys."

Phil Holloway? That name sounds familiar. Were you ever in the K. O. S. E.? I knew a Philip Holloway in that regiment while stationed at Fort William, Calcutta. It would have been around 1910 or 1911. Is it possible that we might be old acquaintances?

Anyway, I was mighty glad to get your letter. Well, I hope I'll be able to give you the information you require.

As to the cost of living: *you* know conditions, and you will understand that it all depends on whether you are going to be in the sahibs set or in "trade." You don't tell me exactly what the job is going to be. But you know how it is: if you belong with the "gentlemen" (accursed word of

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Anglo-Indian snobbery!) if your position will be strictly commercial and thereby render you eligible for membership in the Gymkhana Club, you will have to keep up a certain style and live within certain "respectable" localities. In this case you can scrape along without undue discomfort on about three hundred rupees a month in Karachi or Amritza. Cawnpore would need about another fifty. Of course, you couldn't make a splash on this allowance or do much entertaining; but you could live, with care, without having the rest of the set look sideways at you. You will understand, of course, that a whole lot depends upon yourself and on your wife; also that there can be no half measures. You either belong or you don't belong.

India is the most snobbish country in God's wide earth, and, frankly, it is a whole lot more comfortable to be in with the club people, because,whatever may be your private opinion about the social stuff, there is absolutely nothing else to do but to frequent the club as an antidote to the deadly monotony of life in a small station.

If, on the other hand, your job is going to have the taint of "trade" attached to it—which it does *not* sound like, by the way—you would not have to keep up the position which is demanded of a "gentleman," nor would you have to live in the same localities where rents are high. Under these circumstances you could live very comfortably on two hundred rupees, or even a hundred and fifty.

For your own sake let me wish you that the job is going to belong in the former class. And let me give you a bit of advice. If you go out and get the job and be a "gentleman," don't for the Lord's sake ever breathe a word to a soul that you have been in India before in the army—unless it has been as a commissioned officer. You know how the sahibs look upon Tommy Atkins.

Remember, in all this, that I speak of antebellum conditions. I don't know how the war has changed cost of living or sentiment as to class. The former, I fancy, hardly at all; the latter, perhaps, a whole lot.

Opportunities in South America

Question:—"My one desire is to own a small plantation of some sort in South America. Have already done farming in Cuba. I have a few hundred dollars and a determination to 'get there.' Which is the best part of South America for me to locate?" ——, New Dorp, Staten Island.

Answer, by Captain Dingle:—From having been in Cuba, I understand that you at least speak enough Spanish to pass you. If not, you had better acquire a working knowledge before embarking on your project. Portuguese is also very useful—in fact, essential in some parts—but as a general rule Spanish will serve you.

BRAZIL (Portuguese spoken here) offers many inducements to *bona fide* settlers. You would have no trouble in getting employment either in the cattle or agricultural industries. Sugar, coffee, cacao, rice, cotton to mention only a few staples, offer tremendous opportunities. Write to either the Minister of Agriculture (who handles settlers' problems) at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, or to the Brazilian Consul General, New York City, for fuller information.

URUGUAY, a much smaller republic, has quite as many openings for a man able and willing to work land. Sheep, cattle, and agriculture generally are booming in Uruguay. There are something like 30,000,000 sheep there, and the wool-shearing is becoming one of the world's best and biggest. Millions of acres of available pasture make this industry attractive; and, moreover, in this little country there is always the chance that your land contains some such trifle as oil, gold, coal, or a dozen other things worth while. The mineral resources of Uruguay have been neglected, though now they are coming to the light. Minister of Industries, Montevideo, for full data.

ARGENTINA, perhaps the most attractive southern country for the prospective agriculturist or stock-raiser, possesses vast expanses of land suitable for either purpose. Settlers for this purpose are welcomed if they have means to keep going until their work begins to pay. But this is the case in all those countries. There is a good opening in Argentina for pig-raising on a large scale; sheep and cattle are wide industries; general farming is very profitable. Pigs seem to have been neglected, though; and there is no doubt that they might well be increased to great profit to the breeder. I don't know whether you have dabbled in dairy farming, but butter and cheese are becoming big enough down there to force attention. Write the Department of Agriculture, Plaza de Mayo, Buenos Aires, for fuller information; or to the Consul General of Argentina, 17 Battery Place, N. Y.

Hunting in the Rockies

Question:—"I would like to get some information on hunting in the Rocky Mountains. What part would be the best to hunt for the largest game? What caliber rifle would you advise using? What action do you think the best—slide, lever or automatic? What would be a conservative estimate of the expenses for an outfit for four to take a Winter's hunting-trip there? What game could one expect to get under favorable conditions?"—M. M. BLALOCK, Harleyville, Ala.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—I should take the section of the Rockies from the northwest corner of the Yellowstone Park, or rather from its west side, skirting Idaho. Hunting should be good all the way along to the British line. I have friends in this city who have hunted along that line on the Idaho side and had good luck with bear and elk, using a 30-30, lever-action gun. I have always used a Winchester, since I graduated from the old Sharps, Ballard, and Wesson. Mine is 32-40.

A bolt-action gun is accounted by experts to be the strongest action, but my lever action never failed me yet. The automatic I do not advise for one great and important reason. The average man who is new or not well seasoned in big-game killing will get excited and shoot away all the shells in the magazine before he stops to consider or aim well. Any man can shoot fast enough with either lever or bolt. It is not so much speed that is needed, as the proper placing of shots.

Elk, bear, cougar, sheep, are the big game found there. Sometimes moose.

The expense, per capita, depends so much on the individual taste and judgment that it is hard to estimate satisfactorily. Write to J. Western Warner, Cody, Wyoming; W. C. Vail, Alpine, Idaho;

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Steve Elkins, Kalispell, Montana; or Jas. S. Simpson, Jackson's Hole, Wyoming, for any further information and estimates.

The Hawaiian Islands

Question:—"What is the most direct way to go from Fredericksburg, Va., to Honolulu, Hawaii? What would the fare be?

"What nationalities besides English are found on the Islands? Which predominates? What is the population of Honolulu, natives and English only? What small game is found there? What large?

"What are the prospects for agricultural locations on the Islands? What amount of money would be required for such a location? Would you advise such a location? What is the general state of health on the Islands?"—C. M. SMITH, Fredericksburg, Va.

Answer, by Mr. Halton:—The most direct route from Fredericksburg to Honolulu is via Washington, D. C.; thence to Chicago and San Francisco. Then by steamer from San Francisco. The first-class fare through to Honolulu is $147. This is computing minimum fare on the steamer.

The following table shows the population of the Islands as of June 30, 1916:

Japanese	97,000	Hawaiian	23,770
Portuguese	23,755	Chinese	21,954
American, British, German and Russian	16,042	Part Hawaiian	15,334
		Porto Rican	5,187
		Spanish	3,577
Filipino	16,898	Others	5,254

The population of Honolulu is 70,000, of which about 12,000 are white.

Small game: Duck, plover, snipe, quail, pheasant and doves. There are wild goats, hogs and deer, and in some parts of the Islands, wild turkeys. There is practically no big game.

There is fine fishing in Hawaiian waters.

The prospects for agricultural locations are not good, inasmuch as a small farmer will be competing against Asiatic labor and the question of irrigation will be a problem. However, on this question I should advise you to write to the Land Commissioner at Honolulu.

There is probably no more healthful spot in the world than the Hawaiian Islands.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

ADVENTURE HAS FOUND ONE MAN OUT OF EVERY FIVE ASKED FOR DURING THE PAST TWO YEARS

LAWRENCE SHATTO, enlisted in U. S. Navy in 1914 at San Diego, Calif., last heard of on the U. S. S. *Raleigh*, at Vera Cruz, Mex.; THURSTON HOUGHTON, left Riverside, Calif. for Hutchison, Kans., in 1914; FRANK DEWEY was in Riverside, Calif. in 1916, working for Dow; OTTO SEATON, enlisted in U. S. Navy at Oxnard, Calif. 1917; CORKY CLARK, enlisted in Engineer Corps in 1914 at Riverside, Calif.; BENARD BENNY, left Riverside, Calif. in 1916; Preston, left San Diego, Calif. March 1, 1917. I'm the boy who rode the Pope with you at Ascot in 1915. Know how to keep my mouth shut.—Address BANTY, care *Adventure.*

SILLER, WALTER R. Last heard from Denver House, San Francisco, Calif., 221 3d St., April 22, 1913. Age about 40 years, blue eyes, brown hair, hard of hearing, long face and high cheek-bones, quite tall and about 160 pounds. Worked at mine smelters or on the railroads.—Address MRS. A. H. TREVETHAN, 147 College Ave., Houghton, Mich.

COX, SHERMAN W. or COX, AUSTIN A. From Indianapolis, Ind., were in Denver City and Evergreen, Colo. in 1898 until 1906. Any one knowing their whereabouts, kindly address—FLORENCE H. COX, Halifax City, Nova Scotia, Canada.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

MEADOWS, ROBERT E. Belonged to 21st Infantry, Co. B. He was at Plattsburg helping drill about two years ago, afterward was at Gatun, Panama, helping on some work for the Army, August, 1916. May have enlisted in Army or Navy. Address MRS. M. L. MEADOWS, 219 12th St., Greenville, Ohio.

MCCULLY, MANNING. (About 23 years old, tall, dark and slim.) Worked with New York Edison Co. until 1912. Went to Galveston, Texas, where I heard from him. Interested in electricity. Please address—W. G. KRAMPFF, R. F. D. No. 2, Mansfield Center, Conn.

ROGERS, FRANK F. Last heard of in San Francisco, Calif., just previous the earthquake about eleven years ago. During the Winter of 1900 and 1901 was chief steward of the S. S. *Sonora.* Went to Alaska in Spring of 1901, returned to Frisco in Fall of 1901. Would now be about 63 years of age. Any information concerning him would be appreciated.—Address H. D. SMITH, Champion Bldg., Atlantic City, N. J.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

HOPKINS, HORACE. Last heard of in De Sota, Mo. Remember the old house in the Hollow? Write or send information to—DONALD C. NORRIS, 624 Knower St., Toledo, Ohio.

SHERIDAN, MARTIN A. My wife's father. Last time heard of in St. Paul, Minn., 15 years ago, intending to leave for Australia with his wife. He was a portrait painter. Would greatly appreciate any information regarding him.—Address E. M. SNYDER, 505 13th Ave., East Duluth, Minn.

ZUN, EDW. "BLONDY." From San Francisco, Calif. Last heard of in Victoria, B. C. Was with you in Mexico. I have good news for you. Write.—Address JACK BURTON, 1735 Broadway St., Denver, Colo.

VINC, PETER, friend. Last heard of in 1915 in Ebensburg, Pa., Canadian by birth. Please notify—PRIVATE JOSEPH MICHAEL LAUER, Co. F, 64 U. S. Inf., Ft. Bliss, Texas.

HOLL (BOB), ROBERT. Worked with New York Edison Co., attended Manhattan Vocational Evening School. Last heard of in 1915. Interested in electricity. —Address WM. G. KRAMPFF, R. F. D. No. 2, Mansfield Center, Conn.

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HOGAN, JOHN, *alias* FRANK BURKE. Last heard from at Victory, Wisconsin, Sept., 1913. Any one knowing of his whereabouts address his brother.—WILLIAM HOGAN, 13th Company C. A. D., Ft. Mills, Corregidor, Manila, P. I.

HALL, J. HAROLD, my son. Last heard from in Albuquerque, N. M., December 24, 1914. Father died January 1, 1916. Brothers and sisters want him to come back.—Address MRS. H. LEROY HALL, 3033 Woodward Avenue, Highland Park, Detroit, Michigan.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

CAMPBELL, ORVILLE R. Should write to Charles Campbell, Administrator at Syracuse, Nebraska, for information of importance.

FLINT, HARRY. Last heard of in New York City, October 27, 1917. Would like to hear from him.—Address L. T. 360, care *Adventure*.

FELTON, FRED. Last heard of in Tacoma, Washington, in the latter part of 1914. Home town, Watertown, N. D. Please write.—Address WILLIAM COSEL, No. 1 General Hospital, B. E. F., France.

LYNCH, MISS BARBARA. Last heard of in Detroit Mich. Have important news for her. Any one knowing of her whereabouts please write real soon. Address MRS. N. C. CLENDENIN, 116 7th St., Parkersburg, W. Va.

MACDOUGALL, DOUGALL, with me on U. S. S. *Tennessee* 1907—1910. Last heard of on Great Lakes. Write me.—Address H. J. JENSEN, Alexandria, Minn.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the Mid-February or First March issues of *Adventure*. They can get name and address of inquirer from this magazine.

ADAMS, "JEFF"; Anderson, Nelson Miles; Boulton, George W.; Cease, Lewis; Clark, Harry; Emeigh, Jacob; Fisher, Fred L.; Hutton, William K.; Hyker, Joe; Keene, Carl Howard; Kelly, Sergeant M.; Kratz, Herman A.; Landells, Gavin or Guy; Major, A. S.; McCorry, Guy Lawrence and Guerdon; McKenna; Morrison, Albert; Poag, James; S., Ray T.; Starks, William N.; Weaver, Joseph C.

HASTLAR GAL BREATH. Ruth Gilfillan.

NUMBERS L. T. 284, C 293, W. 311, W. 312, L. T. 343. Please send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at addresses given us do not reach you.—Address HARRY ERWIN WADE, care *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

Besides the book-length novel and the complete novelette mentioned in the ad on page 2, the first April *Adventure*, in your hands on March 3d, will contain the following out-of-doors stories:

A Shift Into Reverse *By Roy P. Churchill*

A story of the *U. S. S. Dixie* and the queer problem she faced in *Cain Dugan*—a problem which took the flaming, sinking *Senator* to solve.

Red Toll *By Hugh Pendexter*

A frontier story of the old Santa Fé trail and the scouts who unhesitatingly faced its perils, though every few days saw their number diminished.

The Man Who Whipped a City *By Hapsburg Liebe*

Westover had beaten *Peter Huntley's* father and it set out to beat him. But the Tennessee town held one reason why *Young Peter* could not take a beating.

The Fetish Stick *By Edgar Wallace*

A story of West Africa and the mighty *ju-ju* that resulted from *Bulnta's* great devil palaver of witch-doctors on the Island of Bats.

Hidden Trails, *Part II* *By William Patterson White*

In the second part of this thrilling tale of the early West the trail of the road-agents becomes even more complicated. But when a deputy sheriff is killed and another shot up, *Johnny* and his friends take up the chase with renewed zeal.

Captain Findlay's Last Voyage *By T. Nichols*

It was a weird thing, that last voyage of *Captain Findlay*—the intense heat, the mystery of the East, the vagaries of a failing mind and the lure of the sea all contributing their part.

Upside Down or Backwards *By W. C. Tuttle*

It all happens because *Magpie* makes a purchase after imbibing too much hooch in Chicago. And when the purchase arrives in Piperock, that staid community experiences worse than a gold-strike.

FIRST APRIL ADVENTURE

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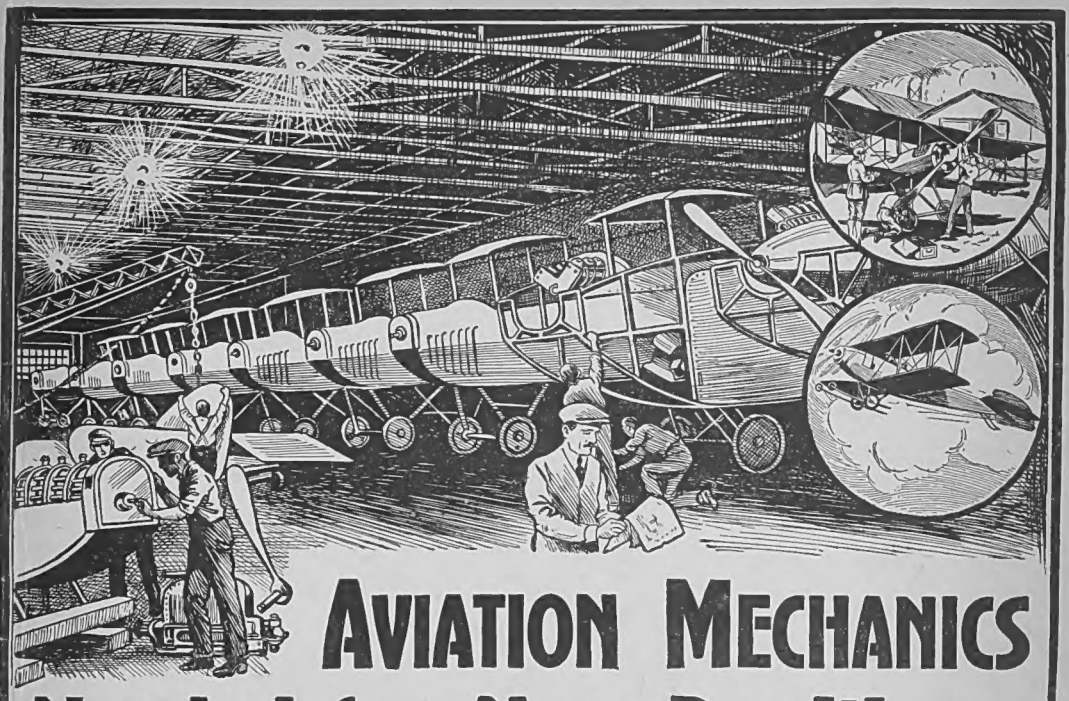

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Aeroplane Mechanician $40 to $60 per week.
Aeroplane Inspector $50 to $75 per week.
Aeroplane Salesman $5000 per year and up.
Aeroplane Assembler $40 to $65 per week.
Aeroplane Builder $75 to $200 per week.

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Fort Bliss, Tex.
My estimation of the new course is excellent; it could positively not be anybetter.

Mr. Z. Purdy
Shreveport, La.
It is hard to believe that lessons on such a subject could be gotten up in such an interesting manner.

Mr. Lloyd Royer
Haigler, Neb.
I can hardly thank you enough for the way you have personally taken up my enrollment.

Mr. Mayne Eble
Manistee, Mich.
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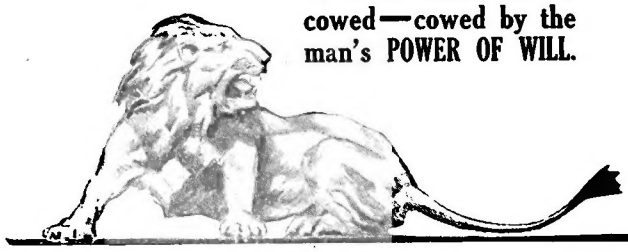
How to secure steady nerves.

POWER OF WILL

Why is this man master? He is unarmed. The lion has the physical strength to tear him to shreds—his mouth is watering, yet he dares not. He is cowed—cowed by the man's POWER OF WILL.



Anyone Can Have An Indomitable Wil

It has long been known that the Will can be trained into wonderful power throug intelligent *exercise*—just as the muscles of the body or any of the senses can l developed through constant use. The trouble with almost everyone is that the do not *use* their wills. They carry out other people's wills, or drift along with circumstances. If you held your arm in a sling for two years, the muscles would become powerless to lift a feather. That is exactly what happens, in most people, to the faculty we call "will-power." Because we never use the Will, we finally become *unable* to use it. We degenerate into beings a little more than slaves—unhappy, discontented, envious, hoping blindly that "some day" —without any effort —we will attain what we most want in life. "Power of Will," by Frank Channing Haddock, Ph.D., M.S., is a scientific course in Will-Training which has helped over 225,000 people. This great work provides a thorough course in Will-Training, consisting of 28 lessons. It reveals the secrets as to how great men train their wills into wonderful power.

For Master-Men

Master-Men like Judge Ben B. Lindsey; Supreme Court Justice Parker; Wu Ting Fang, ex-U. S. Chinese Ambassador; Lieutenant-Governor McKelvie of Nebraska; General Manager Christeson of Wells-Fargo Express Co.; Asst. Postmaster-General Britt; E. St. Elmo Lewis; Governor Capper of Kansas—and literally thousands of other men of action and ambition like them—read, use and praise "Power of Will."

Its readers talk of it as of a Bible. It has made decisive men of action out of the most miserable "down-and-outs." It has cured victims of drink and other vices. It has made big men bigger by showing them how to use their brains better. It is a goad to old and young alike. It has re-awakened ambition in men and women who have been turned from their life purposes, and shown its students how to carry forward their ambitions to consummation.

What Readers Say

Worth $3,000 to $30,000

"From what I have already seen I believe I can get $3,000 to $30,000 worth of good out of it."—*C. D. Vechten, Gen. Agent, Northwestern Life Insurance Co., Cedar Rapids, Ia.*

$897 Profit First Week

"'Power of Will' is a compilation of mighty forces. My first week's benefit in dollars is $900—cost $3; profit $897." (Figure what his yearly profit would be.)—*F. W. Herstand, 910 Tribune Bldg., Chicago, Ill.*

$1,500 to $50,000 Yearly

"Three years ago I was making $1,500 a year and working day and night. To-day I make $1,000 a week and have time for other things as well. To the lessons in the book 'Power of Will' do I owe this sudden rise."—*(Name on request.)*

50% Increase

"More than a year ago I purchased 'Power of Will' and I firmly believe that it —and it alone—has enabled me to increase my salary more than 50% in that time."—*L. C. Huggens, Principal, Mayhew Consolidated Schools, Boswell, Okla.*

Paid 1,000% Profit

"'Power of Will' has more than paid for itself in increased business by a small margin of 1,000% already. —*John V. Colclough, Melrose, Mass.*

Another 1,000% Profit

"I have received 1,000% profit on my investment and can see no reason why it will not mean thousands in cash as well as helping me in all other ways."—*W. Shanks, Payette, Idaho.*

Is YOUR Will Dormant?

Look back upon your life. Once upon a time, no doubt, you weaved great dreams of what you were going to make of yourself. *Are they accomplished now?* Why are they *not* accomplished? Is it not because you lacked a strong, powerful, dominating, inflexible WILL? You allowed *others* to control and influence you to their ends, instead of controlling others yourself. You let insignificant daily incidents everlastingly turn you from your purpose. Gradually—like so many of us —you allowed this God-given faculty of will to become scotched and DORMANT in you. Dr. Haddock has a message for you—*a real message of emancipation from the blasting human curse of indecision and blind habit—a message which every man with ambition should read.*

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The price of the book, although it is really a complete course in Will-Training, is only $3.00. The publishers will gladly send a copy free, for five days' inspection. Send no money now. Merely mail the coupon. If you decide to keep the book, send the money. If not, mail the book back. Tear out and fill in the coupon now, before you turn this page.

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